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Contents

- 109 **Editorial: Reaching the Neglected Muslim World**
Hans M. Weerstra
- 111 **Christian Witness to our Muslim Friends**
Lyle VanderWerff
- 117 **Declaration on Christian Attitudes Towards Muslims**
Association of International Mission Services
- 119 **The Moors: Desert Dwellers Searching for a Better Life**
Adopt-A-People Clearinghouse
- 121 **When Failure is Our Teacher: Lessons from Mission to Muslims**
J. Dudley Woodberry
- 125 **The Muslim Concept of Surrender to God**
Mark Nygard
- 131 **The Great Muslim Challenge: Learning from Their Dedication**
J. Christy Wilson, Jr.
- 135 **Church Planting that Includes Muslim Women**
Fran Love
- 139 **Planting the Church Underground in Muslim Contexts**
Joshua Massey
- 155 **Islam and Human Rights**
David Bentley
-

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Editorial: Reaching the Neglected Muslim World

One of the greatest challenges of world missions is reaching the thousands of Muslim peoples, and millions of Muslim individuals, who to this day remain unreached and unevangelized. We're reminded of "The Lausanne Covenant" that makes the following confession: "More than two-thirds of mankind have yet to be evangelized. We are ashamed that so many have been neglected; it is a standing rebuke to us and to the whole church."

The good news is that, "There is now in many parts of the world an unprecedented receptivity to the Lord Jesus Christ. We are convinced that this is the time for churches and para-church agencies to pray earnestly for the salvation of the unreached and to launch new efforts to achieve world evangelization... The goal should be, that by all available means and at the earliest possible time, every person will have the opportunity to hear, understand, and receive the Good News."

Later on, speaking more specifically to our Western affluence we're reminded that, "We cannot hope to attain this goal without sacrifice. All of us are shocked by the poverty of millions and disturbed by the injustices which cause it. Those of us who live in affluent circumstances accept our duty to develop a simple life-style in order to contribute more generously to both relief and evangelism" (From "The Lausanne Covenant" drafted by the participants, from more than 150 nations, of the International Congress on World Evangelization, July 1974).

What was said then is totally applicable today—including reaching the Muslim world. We should still be ashamed that so many individuals, clustered in thousands of unreached people groups, the majority of whom are Muslim, still have not been evangelized. Truly it remains a standing rebuke to all of us today. And this in light of the fact that today as never before we see

"unprecedented receptivity" among the unreached nations, including Muslim peoples, as well as unprecedented mission know-how and skill to help us complete the task, not to say anything about unprecedented opportunities for mission service, even placed right at our doorsteps. The goal is still the same: using "all available means and at the earliest time, that every person will have the opportunity to hear, understand, and receive the Good News."

Perhaps the crux of the matter lies in our refusal to sacrifice. "We cannot hope to achieve this goal without sacrifice." As Christians we must be able to give a "reasonable answer" to the haunting question why so many individuals and whole nations remain unevangelized to this day. As Robertson McQuilkin, we too must come to grips with the inescapable reality regarding the Great Omission of the Great Commission. Why are so many in our world still unevangelized when there are more than sufficient resources to win them, when we have unprecedented opportunities of open doors everywhere, when we have the needed skills to do the job at hand, etc.? Is it due to the condition of our hearts? Is it because we haven't been willing to "accept our duty to develop (and live) a simple life-style in order to contribute more generously to relief and evangelism" among the people who are still unreached?

There is no easy answer nor a quick fix. The unreached peoples of the world remain unreached, to this day, due to a variety of reason. Although explainable, there are serious unjustifiable reasons that still give us "a standing rebuke." Perhaps we should all read (or reread) Robertson McQuilkin's powerful booklet *The Great Omission*, in which he explains five reasons for the great mission omission in the past and present. McQuilkin would say that it's due to: 1) Our general blindness to God's mission purpose and plan

clearly revealed in the Scriptures. We're pretty blind. We don't really see the Great Commission in Scripture all that well... 2) Our deafness to God's call to us for missions to the lost, especially to those without any access to the Gospel. We're pretty deaf to God's call to go with Him to reach the nations (biblical Gentiles) who still haven't heard... 3) Our general lack of love and concern for the unreached (and distant lost) peoples of the earth. We don't care all that much... 4) Our bad theology that fosters the lie that there must be more than one way. If plan A fails plan B will kick in... and 5) Our prayers are peripheral, that show we have a real power failure.

The above is directly to the point to what you will find in this second special edition of the Journal (Islam II) dedicated entirely to evangelizing the hundreds and thousands of unreached Muslim peoples. The forthcoming articles will not only manifest our mission neglect, but also our past failures and mistakes that in a real sense haunt us to this day. Truly we need to own up to our past and correct our failures. In the power of the Spirit we need to bear witness of Christ to our Muslim friends and neighbors—who are waiting to hear the Good News, who have "an unprecedented receptivity to the Lord Jesus Christ."

Our attitudes towards Muslims need to be corrected. We need to see Muslims as our friends, who stand in need of the Lord's *and our* compassion. We need to lay aside our misconceptions, our prejudices and maybe even our silent hatred towards Muslims.

Not only do we need to pray for them but *with* them as well. As Christians we have much to learn from them (as they from us) especially if we correct our attitudes. Their obedience and zeal, their dedication and commitment, and above all their desire and search for surrender to God, that forms the bedrock

(Editorial continues on page 159)

Christian Witness to Our Muslim Friends

What does witness to Muslims involve? In this article we explore firm foundations for fostering healthy Christian-Muslim relationships, including effective witness and loving service to our Muslim friends and neighbors.

by Lyle VanderWerff

As many have pointed out, Christian witness to Muslims must be grounded in the Bible, the infallible guiding word for faith and practice. We have a good word for our Muslim friends and neighbors, it is God's Word, that Word which became the supreme revelation in the person of Jesus the Christ (John. 1:1-18). Although we live in a pluralistic religious world, we do confess that there is but One God and that it is his Word to which we are subject, to which we surrender. To follow Jesus means to submit to God's reign, to enter into his kingdom. In our witness to our Muslim friends, all is secondary to the message that the God of the universe acts through Jesus the Messiah for the salvation of the world he loves. (John 3:16)

Christians live under the great commandment to love God with their fullest ability and to love their neighbors (all nationalities) as themselves. For those who would heed Christ's commandments to "love their Muslim neighbors" and bear witnesses to the Good News that the kingdom of God has arrived in the person of Jesus the Messiah, several things are needed. Not only must they understand the commission to make disciples of all ethnic groups, teaching them to obey all that Jesus taught, and incorporating these new disciples into the church catholic by baptism, but they must resist the pressures of plurality which are so intolerant of evangelism. We live in a strange time in history when many Christians would maintain the status quo of religious pluralism and circumvent Christ's claims. However, such misguided "tolerance", although

popular in our day, unfortunately undermines the sharing of the love of God. Tragically, it obstructs God's gracious reconciliation and his *shalom* for all nations. Fidelity to Christ and love for our neighbors demands that we share the Gospel with our one billion Muslim friends, clustered in thousand of ethnic peoples, as well as with all the other peoples of the earth.

"Witness" is mandated by Christ. The New Testament term "witness" is derived from the Greek *marturia* meaning "faithfulness" in witness even unto death (martyrdom). "Witness" spans the wider range of mission delegated to Christ's disciples. It embraces the ideas of proclamation of the Gospel, of world evangelization, including to the Jews, Muslims and peoples of other religions. It does not back away from the goal of conversion and incorporation of believers into the church (the Body of Christ). Witness acknowledges that it is God who regenerates, saves, and sanctifies. Thus there is a patience which waits on God to convert and avoids pressuring and manipulating those who appear as candidates for the kingdom of God.

Witness also involves "practicing the presence" of God, the imitation of Christ, the living out of faith among those who have not yet said "Yes" to Christ. In some Muslim lands this has often been the main channel for communicating the Gospel. Witness also involves sacrificial "service" in the name of Christ. It means giving the "cup of cold water", acting in behalf of the poor, hungry, hurting and disenfranchised of the world.

Witness also involves one of the oldest and newest modes of communication—dialogue. Dialogue is two-way conversation by which both parties listen and learn of the other as well as seek to convince the other of the truthfulness of their message. In dialogue Christians must not deny the exclusive claims of Christ, nor ignore the human longing of their neighbors and the nations. Dialogue, however, can never become a substitute for proclamation, baptism, inclusion into Christ's Body and instruction in Christ's teachings. Such would be a violation of the vision of the Gospel.

What does witness to our Muslim friends involve? In this article we can only begin to outline the main elements fostering healthy Christian-Muslim relationships, including effective witness, and loving service to our Muslim neighbors.

Knowledge of Islam

Islam is an historical faith arising in the seventh century A.D., a phenomenon which draws from the rabbinical Hebrew faith, Eastern Christianity, Arab tribal religion and the unique religious experiences of Muhammad (A.D. 570-632). To understand Muslims one must make an effort to enter into the experiences of this post-Christian prophet, including his journey from Mecca (A.D. 622), his dreams for Medina and the Arab world, and the messages of the Quran. This desert faith which became an empire continues to confront peoples today.¹

It is equally important to explore the basic elements of a Muslim worldview, both from its classical and popular

vantage points. One can begin by probing into the Muslim doctrines concerning God, creation (nature), human nature, sin, the way of salvation, ethics, the concept of the ideal community of faith, the meaning of history and eternal destiny. Such knowledge when compared to their counterparts in rabbinical Judaism and biblical Christianity will be crucial to any sustainable dialogue. Serious Muslims will have little patience with those who claim to be followers of “the Way” of Christ but lack either biblical knowledge or personal commitment to him and his purpose.²

Samuel Zwemer, pioneer missionary of the Reformed Church in America and mentor to many mission witnesses to Muslims, challenged his readers with these words:

We must become Muslims to the Muslims if we would gain them for Christ. We must do this in the Pauline sense, without compromise, but with self-sacrificing sympathy and unselfish love. The Christian missionary must first of all know the religion of the people among whom he labors; ignorance of the Koran, the traditions, the life of Muhammad, the Muslim concepts of Christ, the social beliefs....ignorance of these is the chief difficulty in work among Muslims.

History of Missions to Muslims

The past two centuries of Protestant missions to Muslims provide a laboratory of insights. It is well to understand the record of the great Eastern Orthodox Churches who have remained faithful to Christ in the midst of Islam for over 14 centuries. Because of the tight control of the House of Islam (*Dar Islam*) over social institutions and culture wherever it comes to power and its assertiveness elsewhere (House of War, *Dar Harb*), the witness of Christian and other minorities has often been limited. Protestant Christians in the West have much to learn from the sacrificial fidelity of these ancient churches of the East who are conversant with Islam. Perhaps today as never before we can make an ecumenical

and evangelical witness to Jesus Christ and work together for the sake of blessing “all the families of the earth.” Our witness needs to be a partnership with all Protestants, as well as Roman Catholic and Orthodox communions, throughout the Muslim world.

The record of Protestant missions to Muslims since A.D. 1800 is deserving of study as it is filled with lessons to be learned. *Mission to Muslims: The Record* (Lyle VanderWerff, Pasadena, Wm. Carey Library, 1977) contains choice examples from Reformed and Anglican witness both in proclamation and presence. One hundred years of service by the Arabian Mission of the Reformed Church in America contains valuable insights not to be lost. Laborers of the Arabian Mission such as Samuel Zwemer, James Cantine, Paul Harrison, and a host of others offer inspiration as well as vital information for those who travel in their train.³

Christian Witness and Dialogue

Christians must be able to make the case for the authority of the Bible in light of the charge that the Old and New Testaments have been corrupted. Initially Muhammad was convinced that his messages were consistent with the Hebrew Scriptures (Law, Prophets, Writings) and the Christian Gospel (New Testament). When Jews in Medina, who could read and write, challenged such a claim and pointed out some differences, Muhammad charged they had altered the text. This was surely frustrating for him inasmuch as he was illiterate.

Muhammad viewed his faith as standing in the lineage of Noah, Abraham, Moses, the Prophets, John the Baptist, and Jesus. There is no need to dispute his good intentions, even though there is need to contend for the trustworthiness of the Bible and the uniqueness of Jesus Christ!

One must be prepared to meet the corruption and abrogation arguments.

It is well to note that while the Quran abrogates some of its own verses, it does not claim to abrogate either the *Torah*/Law or the *Injil*/Gospel (Surah 5:46).

An apology based on the internal evidences of the Word as well as evidences of the Dead Sea Scrolls and the abundance of extant Greek manuscripts vouch for the safe transmission of the Hebrew canon and the Greek New Testament. A respectful attitude and handling of the Bible as God’s inspired and authoritative Word will encourage our Muslim friends to heed the Bible as more than mere arguments.

In that light we might ask: What is a proper Christian appreciation for the Quran? Although this is a delicate issue, one needs to respect the Quran as a historical expression of the experience and faith of Muhammad and his followers without treating it as the final authority. Like the Book of Mormon, or the Divine Principle of Rev. Moon, one must be knowledgeable, but not give the impression that it is authoritative except where it draws from biblical revelation. Therefore it is essential to build one’s working worldview and essential message on biblical revelation.

Sadly, Muhammad was compelled to rely on oral transmitters of the Gospel (often desert fathers or heretical hermits). When some of his Jewish rivals claimed to be the exclusive elect this surely alienated the prophet of Arabia (Sura 6:6:56-158). It appears that Muhammad often appealed to the Scriptures in order to authenticate his own revelations (Sura 4:150-152; 13:36; 26:192-197; 46:10). He contends that the Quran is an attestation to the Bible (Sura 2:89; 3:48; 5:48; 6:93; 35:31; 46:11f; 46:30). The Quran argues that the words of the Lord cannot be changed (Sura 6:34, 115f; 10:65). The Quran honors the disclosures of God through Jesus, confirming that which came before (Sura 5:46f; 57:27). Muhammad undoubtedly thought he was defending

Jesus against his critics. *The Christian goal must be to guide our Muslim friends into the larger Word of the Bible—to the Word Incarnate.*⁴

God's Oneness and the Messiah

Christians should take the lead in declaring that God is One and that there is none other who is Lord. Such preemptive confession reduces the charge that Christians are polytheists (i.e., Christians worship three gods, Father, Son and Mary). Confession of the Oneness of God stresses, however, that God is not simple or singular, but profoundly complex, magnificent and glorious in his being as testified to by his many names (in Scripture, in the Quran, and in the Ninety-Nine Names recited by Muslims). In due time the Christian must deal with the concept of Trinity, but it is best to focus in on Jesus' identity.

Traditional Islamic theologies tend to give more than half of their space to the doctrine of God. Anyone who wishes to do serious dialogue with a Muslim friend must be prepared to discuss what God is and what he is not! Here again the Christian must be an empathetic companion on a journey through the Bible. A recital of the awesome descriptions of God in the Old Testament (esp. the Psalms and Prophets) and the grand statements about God in the New Testament (esp. the prayerful references of Jesus, the doxologies of Paul, the comparisons of Hebrews, the eschatological vistas of the Apocalypse) will catch the ear of the Muslim truth-seeker.

Testimony of one's personal as well as corporate experience of God's presence and power is vital! For many Muslims, God remains an unconditional and absolute power, an object of awe and fear, too remote to offer the sought after forgiveness and fellowship. Muslims may be both baffled by and yet hungering for a testimony such as *I Dared to Call Him Father or Design of My World* written by converts from Islam who

discovered grace in Christ. (See end note 3.)

If it is true that Jesus is the eternal-incarnate Word of God, ministering on earth, dying and rising to become the reigning Lord of the universe, the Judge of all history and all humanity, then it is advisable to shift the spotlight to him as soon as possible. Effective wit-

Anyone who wishes to do serious dialogue with a Muslim friend must be prepared to discuss what God is and what he is not!

nesses will strive to avoid being sidetracked from the Good News of who he is, what he's done, and what he is yet to do! How does one begin to introduce Jesus the Messiah to a Muslim friend or family? Several suggestions follow:

Invite your friend to join you on a journey through the Bible, visiting selected texts as time allows (from an hour to many months). First, start with the essentials of the call of Abraham and God's Promise (Gen. 12:1-3) and the way of salvation by faith (Gen. 15:6), which points towards the triumph of grace. Discuss how the basic truths of a biblical worldview are available in the Pentateuch, especially in Genesis and Exodus. Second, survey the messianic prophecies of the Old Testament and their fulfillment in the Prophet-Messiah, Jesus. Third, move on to a simple reading of one of the four gospels, possibly Mark or Luke (although a case can be made for soon moving on to Matthew or John). Finally describe how there is the maturing of this worldview in Paul's letters (see end note 4). Share the visions of the history and destiny of

humanity found in Revelation and the central role of the Messiah as God's Prime Minister for now and all eternity.

Pivotal to Christian-Muslim dialogue and effective witness is the question of the Messiah's identity. The challenge in witnessing to Muslims is to interpret the New Testament for Muslims in a way that considers the Islamic context but does not betray the biblical text. The task reminds us of the contemporary relevance of the two on the Emmaus road:

Two Middle Eastern men were walking hopelessly along the road, talking about a crucifixion which seemed to contradict the justice and sovereignty of God himself. The environment, their facial features, and even their clothing are remarkably similar to those of many Muslim people in current times. They have turned their backs on Jerusalem. They see Jesus as a 'prophet mighty in deed and word' but cannot reconcile his messiahship with his execution as a common criminal. They are 'slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken'. But Jesus brings to the two men from Emmaus new light, and truth and enthusiasm. The conversation on the road puts the pieces of the puzzle back together. The two sons of Abraham are restored to the faith. This revealing encounter with Jesus Christ lends itself as a natural vehicle for reflection on crucial issues in witness to Muslims...May many come to know the Unrecognized Companion.⁵

Many Prophets But One Messiah

Kenneth Cragg writes: "A sensitive Muslim introduction to the New Testament has long been a need, unmet in our relationships. There can be no more urgent desire, in this field, than to have the New Testament seriously read and studied in the Islamic world...The best way to face them [the issues] is to merge into one the study of the Islamic Jesus and the New Testament Christ, to have the Christian literature seen through Muslim eyes and the Quranic Jesus for Christian perspection."⁶ We need to recover the Semitic background of Jesus and to understand the Quranic struggle in light of the Jew-

ish distortions and Christian controversies of the seventh century.

There must be respect for Muslims as truth-seekers and God-fearers who long for a fuller knowledge of the One True God and his Messiah. Muslims are still fascinated with Jesus. They are willing to confess so many of the biblical tenets, and yet they are left suspended, not being able to pilgrimage farther in their walk with him. We need to be companions to our Muslim brethren so that together we might move beyond fascination and a seminal faith into obedience and fulfillment in their common human longing. Even as Jews can turn to Jesus, so Muslims can submit to the Messiah and experience the glory of God. In him the Gentiles can and someday all will rejoice!

Fairness and justice oblige Christians to respect the questing of Muslims. We need to be in dialogue, listening to their longing after God and speaking of the Messiah. This is best done in the context of intimate worship, in prayer and devotion. Where the presence of God is practiced there will come occasions for proclamation.

The fact that Muhammad had only partial access to earlier revelations (the Bible), means that he was left longing for the full Word of God. In a sense, the Quran stops with Sura 5, where Jesus remains a "mystery". In the Quran, the title "Christ" (Messiah) is used but never defined. Here is a portrait of Jesus which is limited but essentially embryonic. The fifth Sura suggests that Islam "waits" some fuller disclosure of the Christ who will come again as the Judge. Muhammad never knew the full Gospel of the apostles or the church catholic. Sura 43:81 can be translated as positive: "If the All-Merciful has a son, then I am the first to serve him". Muhammad may have longed for an inclusive view of the covenant from which his Jewish neighbors were excluding him. The challenge is to show how the Messiah is the Mediator of God's grace

and rule (Sura 5:120). We need to explain the larger biblical vision which will ultimately call all peoples to submit to the Messiah's authority, redemption and justice.

The strategic point of contact between Islam and Christianity is Jesus Christ. We must speak of him from the Scriptures (the Gospel) to their Scriptures (the Quran and Hadiths). Christian presence must be accompanied by Christian proclamation. Muslims do respect the Word, the Scriptures. We need to learn to let the Word speak more clearly on its own. We need to rediscover the kerygmatic, declarative approach. This is the hope lying behind a recital of the names of the Messiah. Such recitation may trigger dialogue and a fresh reading of the New Testament by all. It may lead to a theological reconstruction like a Messianic mosque or a "Muslims for the Messiah" movement. Jesus will gain preeminence wherever the Spirit works until all declare that "Jesus is Lord".

The Names of Jesus

There is power in a "name" whether that be a name for God (Allah) or for Jesus. While the Quran acknowledges Jesus as the Messiah, it leaves the title and concept of Messiah/Christ undefined. Few tasks equal the challenge of recovering the content of the terms for the Messiah.

How should the names of the Messiah be introduced? We suggest to begin with the Old Testament names and promises of the Messiah. Allow the Hebraic/Semitic testimony of Yahweh (Allah) establish itself. If Quranic references are to be considered, treat them as intertestamental documents (e.g., the Apocrypha), valid where they are consistent with biblical revelation but otherwise secondary to canonical literature. Muslims are to be respected as seekers and encouraged to hear Jesus' invitation, "Come and see" which must be frequently recited.

We also must allow the full New Testament to flesh out the content of Jesus' names and claims. We need to interpret contextually those messianic titles at which Muslims are prone to take offense (e.g., Son) so that they can realize that these are not contrary to a Semitic monotheistic confession. Allow the multiple witnesses from Genesis to Revelation to speak for themselves. It's important that we frequently pause in the conversation to pray that the Holy Spirit may draw all participants into faith and fullness. Confess that the Sovereign God is above all Scriptures and that his Messiah is the Living Word. Honor the Messiah as the reign (kingdom), the power (authority), and the glory of God!

Muslims who know the 99 names for God know the power of a name. In the context of study and worship, we can bear witness to who Jesus is and what God has done and is doing through him. We surely must explore and employ modes of expression which our Muslim neighbors can appreciate. In our open recitation and public introduction to Jesus the Messiah, there may be prayerful utterance, chant and song, standing, hand lifting, head bowing, kneeling and prostration. Such a recital must always be first and foremost worship (focused on and lifted up to God) and only secondly witness (testimony to persons present). We can combine the best of Protestant piety and the liturgical riches of Eastern Orthodox and Roman Catholic communions. Our orientation (*qiblah*) can be directed upward to God the Father and the Anointed One who reigns from his right hand and who is powerfully present by his Spirit. There is but One God who bridges from heaven to earth, from transcendent glory to our human temporality. Our direct devotion, our adoring praise, is undebatable. By such witness we can challenge our Muslim friends to search the Scriptures as to the identity and

work of the Messiah!

Christians and congregations who would bear fruitful witness in the midst of Islam need to create litanies for worship and witness which appeal to Muslim seekers. (See examples, pp. 190-191, *Emmaus Road*).

The Basic Question of Salvation

If the basic question for Muslims is seeking the truth about God (and his Messiah), then the second question of their longing hearts is, "What must we do to be saved?" What hope is there? Behind this burning question lies the central concerns of every worldview, the concerns of anthropology, soteriology, and ethics. The three basic questions are: What was/is the essence of human nature? What troubles humanity? What is wrong? What is the cure? What must we humans do to be saved? A witness to Muslims must be conversant with both the Muslim answers and the Good News given in the Word centered in Christ.

At many points, Christians and Muslims, who are both heirs of the Old Testament, share a similar view of humanity. They know that in Adam we all have fallen. But sin for Muslims is not quite so serious as in the Bible where it is defined as: (1) rebellion against God, (2) missing the mark and losing our true destiny, (3) a condition of alienation with God, a condition from which we cannot extricate ourselves, and (4) the array of "sins" which are but symptoms of our fallen state. The language of "original sin" (the whole human race is afflicted by the original rebellion) and "total depravity" (that we are sinful in every dimension of our being, mind, heart, will, actions) are not accepted by most Muslims.

How then must human sin and failure be explained? The traditional Muslim view is that human beings were

created weak and imperfect. Because of this reduced view of creation and sin, Muslims often fail to see the need for a mediator nor see the need nor purpose for the drastic atonement portrayed in the cross of Christ. By their good nature and by means of their good deeds, Muslims believe they can make their way back to God via confession and perfor-

Christians and congregations who would bear fruitful witness in the midst of Islam need to create litanies for worship and witness which appeal to Muslim seekers.

mance of the five pillars. God will excuse their sins because he knows our human weakness. They may wander from the "straight path" for a time but as long as they don't apostatize by committing *shirk* (idolatry) they will remain Muslim and reach heaven and be saved.

The biblical estimate of our created humanity starts higher and falls lower. We are created in the image of God, i.e., endowed with capacity for fellowship with God and worshipful service unto him. But we have fallen far! As a consequence of our rebellion, our true nature is marred and we are in a state of alienation from our Creator which can only be remedied by God's sacrificial grace and by the human response of faith to him (Gen. 15:6; Eph. 2:8ff.). We are truly lost! Only God himself can bridge the gap, and breach the barrier, or redeem us, which he has and does in the person and work of his Messiah.

The Good News is that God in Christ has done for us what we could and cannot ever do for ourselves. This is the Gospel. It fulfills all the prophecies of God and will never be superseded. It needs to be proclaimed by every generation to all the peoples of the earth until

history's conclusion. (Matt. 24:14)

The Church in Christian Witness

The local Christian church plays a strategic role in welcoming the Muslim seeking after God in Christ. Churches are to be gates to the kingdom, be places of proclamation of the Word (see the writings of Samuel Zwemer in *Christian Mission to Muslims*, pp. 224-

268, 291-295). Representing Christ, its members must provide the hospitality of Christ. The church must become the new home for those who convert to Christ (see the writings of Temple Gairdner in *Christian Mission to Muslims* pp. 187-283, 279-282).

The church is a sign of the presence of the kingdom, the new and model human society that is yet to come. It is a reality to be realized. It is the covenant community wherein peoples of all backgrounds are to be embraced as brothers and sisters in Christ. It is to be the new home for the convert from Islam. There are new experimental efforts to form "churches without walls" or house churches that retain many of the liturgical and cultural patterns of the mosque so as to ease the transition for Muslims who have found the Messiah. Yet every worshipping, witnessing fellowship of believers should be ready to incorporate such brethren into the family of God—the Church of Jesus Christ.

Christians should also join Muslims in fostering a larger society, a new social order, in which religious freedom is maintained. Agreeing with the Quran and the Bible's cry for liberty, "Let there be no compulsion, no coercion, in religion". "Let there be religious freedom" as stated in the Charter of the United Nations. Most Islamic lands have not gone through the struggles of a Protestant Reformation which resulted in appreciation for liberty, especially

religious liberty. On the other hand however, we do not advocate a divorce between faith and human society. Rather faith should transform culture until the perfect reign of God's kingdom comes. Until Christ returns we must allow the wheat and tares to grow side by side. Let the global vision given in the Messiah prevail and let each believer bear witness to that glorious hope!

End Notes

1. First time students and missionaries of Islam might read, *The Call of the Minaret* by Kenneth Cragg (New York, Oxford University Press, 1956); *Muhammad Prophet and Statesman* by W. Montgomery Watt (London, Oxford U. Press, 1961); *An Introduction to Islam* by Frederick M. Denny (New York, Macmillan, 1985); *The Meaning of the Glorious Koran* by M. M. Pickthall (New York, Mentor, 1955); and *History of the Islamic Peoples* by Carl Brockelmann (New York, Capricorn, 1960).
2. Readings in this area might include: *The Teaching of the Quran* by H.U. W. Stanton (London, SPCK, 1919/1969); *The Formative Period of Islamic Thought* by W. Montgomery Watt (Edinburgh University Press, 1973); *The Dome and the Rock* by Kenneth Cragg (London, SPCK, 1964); *How to Understand Islam* by Jacques Jomier (New York, Crossroad, 1991); *Toward Understanding Islam* by Harry G. Dorman (New York, Columbia University, 1948); *Islam from Within* by K. Cragg and Marston Speight (Belmont California, Wadsworth 1980).
- Resources for understanding Islam's interaction with modernity may be found in: *Islamic Surveys 3: Counsels in Contemporary Islam* by K. Cragg (Edinburgh University, 1965); *Introduction to Islamic Civilization* by R.M. Savory (Cambridge University Press, 1976); *Islam in the Contemporary World* by C.K. Pullapilly (Notre Dame, Indiana, Cross Roads, 1980); *Islam in Asia* by John Esposito, (New York, Oxford, 1987); *Islamic Values in the United States* by Yvonne Y. Haddad and Adair T. Lummis (New York, Oxford, 1987).
3. Valuable resources aiding our understanding of the dynamic interaction between Christians and Muslims include: *Islam: A Christian Perspective* (Exeter, Paternoster Press, 1983) and *Frontiers in Muslim-Christian Encounter* (Oxford, Regnum Books, 1987) by Michael Nazir-Ali, as well as the superb works by Kenneth Cragg, *Sandals at the Mosque: Christian Presence Amidst Islam* (London, SCM, 1959; *Muhammad & The Christian: A Question of Response* (Maryknoll, Orbis, 1984); *Jesus and the Muslim: An Exploration* (London, Allen & Unwin, 1985); and *The Christ and the Faiths* (Philadelphia, Westminster, 1986).
- Useful insights may also be found in *Sharing Your Faith with a Muslim* (Minneapolis, Bethany Fellowship, 1980) by Abdiyah Akbar Abdul-Haqq; *Design of My World* by Hassan Dehqani-Tafti (London, Lutetworth, 1959); and *A Christian Approach to Muslims, Reflections from West Africa* by James Dretke (William Carey Library, 1979). Phil Parshall has contributed *New Paths in Muslim Evangelism* (Grand Rapids, Baker, 1980); *Bridges to Islam: ...Folk Islam* (Grand Rapids, Baker, 1983); and *Beyond the Mosque: Christians within Muslim Community* (Grand Rapids, Baker, 1985).
- Most significant are the insights from Lamin Sanneh, an African scholar from Gambia, a convert from Islam who chides Western scholars for a loss of nerve. He urges them to meet Muslim friends at the depths of their spiritual encounter with the living Lord and not to be so quick to accommodate themselves to the prevalent secularism of our time! Worthy of reading is "Muhammed, Prophet of Islam, and Jesus Christ, Image of God: A Personal Testimony" (*International Bulletin of Missionary Research* 8[4]: pp.169-174...1984), "Can a House Divided Stand? Reflections on Christian-Muslim Encounter in the West," (*International Bulletin of Missionary Research* 17[4]: pp. 164-168, 1993), and his mature work in *Translating the Message: The Missionary Impact on Culture* (Maryknoll, NY, Orbis Books, 1989).
- From the Lausanne Committee for World Evangelization comes *Muslims and Christian on the Emmaus Road* (Monrovia, CA, MARC, 1989) edited by Dudley Woodberry. Also helpful is *The Christian Approach to the Muslim* (London, Edinburgh House, 1964) by G. E. Marrison. Most helpful are David Brown's five works *Jesus and God*; *The Christian Scriptures*; *The Cross of the Messiah*; *The Divine Trinity* and *The Church and the Churches* (London, Sheldon Press, 1969). Byron L. Haines and Frank L. Cooley represent Presbyterians exploring a dialogical approach in *Christians and Muslims Together* (Philadelphia, Geneva Press, 1987).
4. Be prepared to recite key verses of Scripture which clearly spell out the way of salvation. There is nothing so effective as the authoritative Word of God. By the Word, the Holy Spirit penetrates the human mind and heart and will! (Contact the editor for a list of some twenty key Scripture passages that spell out the way of salvation by faith in Christ as Lord and Saviour.)
5. See *Muslims and Christians on the Emmaus Road* by J. Dudley Woodberry (Monrovia CA, MARC, 1989 especially "The Names of Christ in Worship" by Lyle L. VanderWerff, pp. 175-194).
6. In *Jesus and the Muslim* (London, Allen and Unwin, 1983, p. xiv f.)

Dr. Lyle VanderWerff is professor of religion at Northwestern College of Iowa. He organized the International Congregation of the National Evangelical Church in Kuwait.

Declaration on Christian Attitudes Towards Muslims

Current statistics describe Western contributions to Christian work among Muslims as less than two percent of total Western mission resources. This uneven distribution appears to be the result of general misconceptions about the Muslim world. These misconceptions are particularly intensified in Western countries due to the Gulf War, hostage crises, and terrorist attacks. Popular imagery within both national media and religious circles can lead to conclusions suggesting Muslims to be “enemies” and “people unable to receive the Gospel of Jesus Christ.” Part of this image is caused by Western media attention to pro-Israel issues without due consideration being given to the other side of the same issues.

We are commanded by Scripture to love all people, including Muslims. As followers of Jesus Christ, we are obligated by the Great Commission mandate in Matthew 28 to effectively communicate the Gospel of Christ to all peoples, without exception or criteria.

Regardless of how much effort we have contributed to world mission, we have failed to provide the necessary resources to adequately communicate the Gospel of Jesus Christ to the Muslim world. In the future, we will endeavor to assure that our view of the Muslim world demonstrates the same love Jesus Christ displayed for all humanity on the Cross of Calvary.

We who are followers of Jesus Christ, believing that it is our primary responsibility to share the Good News of Jesus Christ with all the peoples of the world, confess that:

- 1) We have failed to understand the significance of the many emotional issues of Muslim peoples, especially in regard to the nation of Israel;
- 2) We have allowed our false perceptions and lack of understanding to result in wrong attitudes and a lack of compassion for Muslim peoples and, therefore, have not sought to alleviate suffering among them;
- 3) We are guilty of believing and perpetuating misconceptions, prejudice and, in some instances, hostility and outright hatred toward Muslim peoples;

4) We have not recognized the timing of the Lord when the Holy Spirit has moved on the hearts of Muslims and given these nations a hunger for an understanding of true Christianity. In spite of our attitudes, the Holy Spirit is working among Muslim peoples through Christian witness and direct revelation.

We repent of attitudes of apathy and hostility we have borne toward Muslims. Repentance is a decision that results in a change of mind, which in turn leads to a change of purpose and action. Reconciliation is the goal of our repentance. In an effort toward reconciliation, we pledge to:

- 1) Earnestly pray on a committed basis for the acceptance of the Gospel of Jesus Christ by all Muslim peoples;
- 2) Earnestly pray on a committed basis for followers of Jesus Christ to develop attitudes of compassion, love and forgiveness toward Muslims;
- 3) Act within our individual spheres of influence to rebuke sinful attitudes that we encounter within the Christian community;
- 4) Earnestly advocate prayer and relief and development assistance for Muslim peoples, some of whom are the poorest, least educated, least medically provided for, and most victimized by violence;
- 5) Support on a committed basis our brothers and sisters already working in the Muslim world through prayer and financial support; and
- 6) Earnestly pray and seek God’s will to determine our individual role in ensuring that all Muslims have an opportunity to understand and respond to the Good News of Jesus Christ. One clear way is by developing relationships and sharing our faith with Muslims who live in our communities and around the world.

Drafted by the Association of International Missions Services (AIMS) in cooperation with AIMS member agencies focusing on the Islamic world.

The Moors: Desert Dwellers Searching for a Better Life

Drought, tribal and racial hostilities threaten the Moors of the Sahara

by Adopt-A-People Clearinghouse

The hot day was drawing to a close over the desert. A man with pale features sat tending a small shop at the edge of the poverty stricken section of the city. Mohammed Lemine's eyes were lull of remorse. He was remembering the nights that he had bedded down his herds of goats, sheep, and camels in the distant valley. The air had been crisp and fresh, his stomach full of camel meat and goat milk, as his family prepared to sleep under the vast Saharan sky. A Moor, Mohammed Lemine had been the head of his family and a leader of a proud people who had freely roamed the vast expanse of the Sahara desert for over a thousand years.

All of this was now only a memory. The droughts of the 1970's and 80's had reduced Mohammed's herds. Political lines drawn across the desert had prevented him from moving his remaining animals to places where they might have survived. Thus, he and his family had eaten or sold the last of their herd and moved, along with thousands of others nomads, to Nouakchott, the capital city of Mauritania. It was their only way to stay alive. Mohammed Lemine and most of the other former nomads and small farmers of Mauritania were forced to find new ways to provide for their families.

Today the government encourages farming, but the persistent drought and lack of agricultural land discourage most who try. Therefore, over 80% of the Moors are now living in urban

areas. This urbanization process has happened so rapidly that adequate provisions for basic sanitation, housing, and jobs have not been met.

Islamic Invaders

Most Westerners remember the Moors as the Islamic invaders who came from North Africa and ruled in Spain before being driven out in the 11th century, many of whom settled again in North Africa. However, the Moors of Mauritania are of Arab-Berber stock.

A Poor People and Country

Present day Moors are the pre-dominate people of Mauritania, a very poor West African nation made up mostly of desert country created by European nations who presumptuously drew lines on maps with no consideration for the various tribal groups living in the region for centuries. In addition to their poverty, racial and tribal hostilities have caused much tension internally and also between Mauritania and its northern and southern neighbors of Morocco and Senegal.

Social Struggle

Mauritania is an Islamic state with Islamic courts that have taken some steps towards democracy in a society built around a strict caste system. At the top are the White Moors who make up one-third of the people. They

hold the reigns of political and social power and also control what little wealth there is in the nation. The White Moors look down on the Black Moors, but historically have protected them. The Black Moors are descendants of slaves taken from Sub Sahara Africa. The distinction is more social than racial. The remaining third of the population is made up of non-Moors, Black Africans who are being suppressed by the Moors, sometimes brutally. Although officially outlawed, slavery still exists. There is increasing tension between these various groups.

The Moors: Desert Dwellers Searching for a Better Life

The Gospel is Forbidden

The Hassaniya Arabic language, spoken by the Moors, is the official language of the nation. French is still accepted as the language for conducting business. However, there are no Scriptures in Hassaniya nor Christian radio nor recorded messages. Missionaries are not allowed in the country, and it is against the law to evangelize in Mauritania.

The Moors converted to Islam in the 7th century. For many, Islam is a veneer of a deeper belief and fear in magic, sorcery, and occultism. Less than 1% of the Moors have a relationship with Jesus Christ.

Pray for the Moors!

* **Pray** that God will break the spiritual darkness over the Moor people and prepare their hearts to receive the

Gospel. There are only a handful of Christians among the million plus Moors.

* **Pray** for the 50,000-70,000 Moors who have moved south, across the Senegal River Valley, settling with relatives in Senegambia and immigrating there to trade. A few of these immigrants, also known as the Maure, have become Christians. Ask God to establish a living church among the Maure in Senegambia that would carry the Gospel into Mauritania.

* **Pray** for the protection of Christians in relief and development work and other capacities who have been allowed into the country to assist in

refugee work. Pray that they will be salt and light while being of one mind and spirit in their witness and walk for the Lord.

* **Pray** that the Bible will be translated into Hassaniya Arabic. Also, pray that radio programs, audio cassettes, and the *JESUS* film can be translated and made available soon.

* **Pray** that this desert-bound nation's need for becoming economically sufficient will provide a practical means for Christians to show the love of Christ through investment capital and practical assistance.

Facts on the Moors

Religion:

Sunni Islam—White Moors
Animism, Islam—Black Moors.

Population:

930,000 White Moors/Bidan.
370,000 Black Moors/Haratine.

Language: Hassaniya Arabic.

Diet: Vegetables (in season), rice, millet, dates, goat milk and meat (goat and camel). Large percentage of food has to be imported.

Health Care: There are 170 doctors and 13 hospitals/dispensaries. Most doctors are near the large main hospital at Nouakchott. High rate of common diseases.

Literacy: 2.8%

Art Forms: Beautiful poetry and music.

Churches: 0

*“Again, I tell you that if two of you on earth agree about anything you ask for, it will be done for you by my Father in heaven.”
(Matthew 18:19)*

For more information and copies of prayers cards on the Moors and other unreached peoples contact:

The Adopt-A-People Clearinghouse
P.O. Box 17490

Colorado Springs, CO 80935 U.S.A. Tel. 719-574-7001; Fax: 719-574-7005

When Failure is Our Teacher: Lessons from Mission to Muslims

by J. Dudley Woodberry

Failure can be one of the best teachers, because it encourages us to keep reevaluating our approaches rather than blindly carrying on business as usual. Our reevaluation must look at the missionary, the approach, the context, and the receptors. Since the thrust of our reflection will center on the approach, let us briefly look at the other elements.

Though no mission work has had less success than Christian mission to Muslims, the failure should not be laid primarily at the door of the missionary, for no finer train of Christ's ambassadors have appeared in missions. None have surpassed them in dedication, training, and perseverance.

The obstacles have been primarily in the nature of the receptors and their context. The barriers have been first *sociological*. In most regions where Islam predominates there is group solidarity, which leads to family and community ostracism and persecution of the convert to Christianity. In some cases the historic Law of Apostasy in Islam has resulted in death to the convert. Recently this has taken place in many places such as in Iran and Pakistan.

The second type of barriers have been *theological*. Since Islam is the only world religion to rise after Christianity, Muslims believe that all that is of value in Christianity is contained in Islam, and they commonly hold that the Jewish and Christian Scriptures have been corrupted. As traditionally understood, their Qur'an also specifically denies such cardinal Christian doctrines as the Trinity and Christ's incarnation, sonship, and crucifixion.

The third barriers are *political*. Since Islam is understood to apply to every area of life, including the political realm, non-Muslims are commonly *de facto* (if not *de jure*) second class citi-

zens. Despite ancient churches which date back to pre-Islamic times, Christianity is often associated with the West, and considered foreign.

This identification has led, fourthly, to *cultural* barriers. Western forms of worship have often been imported without the recognition that most Muslim forms of worship have been adopted or adapted from Jews and Christians.

Fifthly, *historical* obstacles are based on the fact that much of the contact between Muslims and Christians militarily, politically, and religiously has been hostile. The Muslim enemies have included successively the Byzantines, medieval Europe, the Crusaders, the colonial powers, and Western "economic imperialists" and supporters of Israel—all in some way considered "Christian" by Muslims.

Finally, there are the *spiritual* obstacles, for "we wrestle not against flesh and blood." The popular forms of Islam actually encountered have often been mixed with occult elements from local folk religions.

Historic Approaches

One approach that led largely to failure was the attempt by missionaries under the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Mission to work almost exclusively to be catalysts in the revival of the ancient churches of the Middle East, who in turn would be the major evangelists to the Muslims. Although there have been notable exceptions up to the present day, generally the barriers of fear, prejudice, custom, and even language, alienated the Muslims and militated against the traditional Christians being interested in reaching out to the Muslims. Particularly after the massacres of Armenians and Nestorians by Muslim Turks and Kurds, Christians

wanted to emigrate from Muslim areas and not seek to bring the Muslims into the Church. *The first main lesson to be learned is that missionaries should not choose antagonists of Muslims to be the major means for reaching them.*

Related to the choice of people for outreach to them was the choice of language. Many missionaries to the Middle East learned Armenian or neo-Aramaic to work with the traditional Christians, but this made them incomprehensible to the Muslims. Even among Muslims the choice of Arabic, Turkish, Kurdish, or Persian could alienate the missionary from other Muslims, where cultures were in conflict even if they understood the language. *Lesson two is to choose the heart language of the Muslim people to which one is called.*

Since groups such as Nestorians, also called Assyrians, were more responsive to the gospel as preached by Western Protestants and Roman Catholics, missions tended to cluster where the Nestorians were found. The result was considerable competition among Christians, leading to confusion, not to mention cynicism, by Muslims as to what true Christianity was. *The third lesson, therefore, is that Christians should practice comity—at least by people groups.*

Though missionaries often opposed the actions of their home countries, in the eyes of those they hoped to reach missionaries were linked to colonial powers. When these colonial powers were seen to betray Middle Easterners in the partitioning of land after World War I, for example, this reflected badly on the missionaries and their message. The same is true today when the missionaries' sending countries support such locally unpopular causes as Zionism. At times missionaries have

been viewed as the vanguard of foreign military and political incursions. Independence or revolution in many Muslim countries, such as the revolution in Libya in 1969, led to the banning of foreign missionaries.

At other times missionaries have been linked too closely with local governments which suppressed various local peoples or engaged in unpopular or unjust acts. In the factional politics of parts of the Muslim world close association with a government becomes a disadvantage when that government is deposed. Although the gospel speaks prophetically to political structures and people, *lesson four is that missionaries need to avoid close alliances with governments, both foreign and local.*

Another failure involved the approach to the decision making process. Missionaries from the West, where individualism is a dominant value, have often approached individuals, who became extracted from their clan and families as they became Christians. At times children were approached with the gospel in contexts where they had little influence on the decision making of the family and clan. The results led to ostracism and persecution of the individuals for breaking from group beliefs and practice, and little impact was made on the groups as a whole from which they came.

Although many other factors are at work, there have been greater results in places like Bangladesh where conscious effort was made to involve decision makers of the village or clan by delaying baptism of individuals until the head of the family could also be baptized. *Lesson five is to seek to use the natural channels of decision making process in each culture.*

Failure to understand or incorporate sound biblical contextualization has also led to failure. Missionaries have often failed to understand that the form of Christianity they brought had been contextualized to their own culture by the

questions their ancestors asked or did not ask of Scripture and by the ways they found worship meaningful.

Furthermore, the missionaries failed to see how God contextualized his relationship with humans in succeeding generations. For example, God's covenant with Abraham was expressed by passing between severed animals and by circumcision—both practiced in the local culture.

Likewise, the structure of the church in the New Testament was originally patterned after the synagogue, which was not divinely instituted but developed in the dispersion where Jews could not get to a central temple in Jerusalem. At first the church had only elders like the synagogue but then added deacons as more functions were needed.

Some of the forms of worship brought to Muslim lands were particularly offensive. In this respect missionaries could have learned much from observing the types of Islam that flourished among different Muslim peoples. For example, why did the Naqshibandi order of mysticism with its dancing and music flower more among some Kurdish Muslim groups than the traditional forms of Sunni mosque worship without music and dance?

Many missionaries branded so-called Muslim forms of worship and religious vocabulary as wrong, without knowing that virtually all quranic religious vocabulary, including the name "Allah," and virtually all the forms of worship, except those specifically related to Muhammad, were used by Jews and/or Christians before they were used by Muslims. Thus, unless they have taken on unbiblical meanings during their sojourn in Islam, they could bear the gospel again if local people found them helpful, as in Bangladesh where the New Testament has been translated using vocabulary that Muslims use and where followers of Christ have been free to adopt forms of prayer like their

Muslim neighbors without compromising biblical content. *The sixth lesson is that attention needs to be given to the Muslim receptors to see how the gospel can be most relevantly expressed and contextualized to them.*

This contextualization process will not only employ vocabulary and forms of worship but also motifs or metaphors that are used to explain the theology of the gospel. For instance, the writer of the Epistle to the Hebrews, under the guidance of the Spirit of God, used the sacrificial system to explain the atonement. Paul in the Roman Empire was guided to use the language of the court of law. Throughout history Christian scholars have developed various theories to explain the atonement. For example, Anselm developed the satisfaction theory where one person of God satisfies another person of God. Yet this division of God is harder for Muslims to grasp than some other explanations.

Missionaries have often gone to the field ill-equipped to understand Islam. They have been trained in "The Christian Message to Islam" and think of Islam as a monolithic system rather than a cluster of beliefs, practices, and cultures. They have only studied formal Islam, whereas perhaps most of the Muslims they encounter have beliefs and practices heavily influenced by local folk religion. They have emphasized the cognitive, the theological, only to find that folk Muslims are more interested in power. (Does God through Christ have more power than the spirits I fear?) They have assumed Muslims have the same felt needs as the Christian missionary, not realizing that the folk Muslim commonly sees the need for a savior from fear more than the need for a savior from sin. The Qur'an describes human nature as essentially good or neutral, unlike the Bible which describes it as sinful and biased towards wrong. Hence Muslims often only ask, "What is the will of God?" while Chris-

tian ask,” How can I be transformed to do His will?” *The seventh lesson, overlapping the lesson on contextualization, is that missionaries need to learn the great varieties of Muslim peoples and their felt needs and longings, in order to meet them with the Gospel where they are.*

Another problem relates to utilizing methods that met felt needs but did not lead to an easy transition of planting self-financing, self-governing, and self-propagating indigenous churches. The missionaries brought in schools and medical clinics and hospitals. These presented a holistic gospel but also brought in institutions that could not be supported financially and in personnel by the local church, thus ensuring continued foreign involvement and the necessity of a major amount of time, energy, and resources to maintain the institutions. *The eighth lesson is that method and means should be emphasized that foster planting an indigenous churches that are self-governing and financing, and are self-propagating.*

Finally, missionaries have not always been sufficiently aware of “the fullness of time” for various people groups and cultures. For many peoples, a period of pre-evangelism is necessary; and history has shown that historic events lead to periods of responsiveness to the gospel. Such a time was the late 1960s in Java when the Communists made an abortive coup which provoked Muslim Santris to massacre many Communists and even suspected Communists. When it became necessary to choose a faith to show that Indonesians were not atheistic Communists, many chose Christianity because of the bad example of orthodox Muslims and the helpfulness of Christians. *The ninth lesson is that timing is important as increased responsiveness follows catastrophes, change of location or conditions, suffering from co-religionists, or disillusionment with peoples’ faith or faith community.*

God is Blessing

Despite the failures of the past, there is a greater responsiveness to the gospel among Muslims today than ever before. God is using some of the failures of society to bring this about. We shall look at five phenomena that God is using to bring Muslims to Christ.

First are *political* events. The revolution in Iran led to the imposition of strict Islamic law, but this in turn led to disillusionment with that form of Islam, with the result that there was an increase in the sale of Bibles and an increase of Muslims coming to churches to find Christ. Likewise in Pakistan when President Zia al-Haq tried to impose Islamic law into government, more Bibles were sold, more enrolled in Bible correspondence courses, and more proclaimed faith in Christ. When East Pakistanis suffered under their co-religionists from West Pakistan in the name of maintaining the unity of Islam, they not only formed Bangladesh but became more responsive Christ.

When the Kurds of northern Iraq suffered under their fellow Muslim Saddam Hussain, they likewise became more responsive. When the Soviet Union collapsed, the Muslims of the former central republics became responsive because of their spiritual hunger after 70 years of atheistic rule. God is using political event for the gospel.

A second phenomenon involves *natural catastrophes*. In places like Bangladesh these have involved tidal waves and Christian agencies bailing out “cups of water” in Christ’s name. In places south of the advancing Sahara Desert, it has involved drought and giving cups of water or milk in Christ’s name. But on the whole, Christian relief and development agencies have been more responsive than their Muslim counterparts, with the result that Muslims have seen the love of Christ and responded to Him.

The third phenomenon is the

migration of peoples. This has been from war or increased opportunity, as in urbanization. Flight from the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan made over a quarter of Afghans refugees. Many fled to countries with greater freedom for gospel proclamation and found faith in Christ. Likewise, many refugees from the war triggered by the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait were aided by Christians and turned to Christ. Still others migrated to cities, where they needed friends and were more open to new ideas. Later many have become secularized or disillusioned and adopt fundamentalist Islam, but during a window of opportunity numbers have been coming to Christ.

A fourth phenomenon is a *desire for power*, especially for those who feel powerless in the wake of sickness or fear of evil spirits. As more Christians are open to God, who demonstrates His power through them in answer to prayer, God is showing His power in healing, even as He in other situations shows His power through giving grace to see people through suffering. This has been a factor in the growth of the church in Muslim areas of Africa and elsewhere.

Finally, there is *ethnic resurgence*. God used this factor where Kurds were suppressed by their co-religionist Saddam Hussain. We also see this in places like Bangladesh where Muslims find that they can worship God in Christ through culturally relevant ways without feeling foreign.

Failure has been a good teacher, and the God whose strength is made perfect in weakness continues to work in our failures to teach us to become more effective witnesses for him in our mission to Muslims.

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The Muslim Concept of Surrender to God

In seeking to understand Muslims it is essential to grasp the dominating themes of their faith. Unity, guidance, and obedience rank particularly high. In this article the author traces the development of the most fundamental Muslim concept that forms the touchstone of their identity—surrender to God.

by Mark Nygard

The Pakistani Muslim leader Abul A'la Mawdudi, surely represents many Muslims when he expressed pride that his religion was not, like so many others, named after a specific person or group. He points out that Christianity takes its name from Christ, Buddhism from Buddha, Zoroastrianism from Zoroaster, Judaism from the Jews. Islam, however, takes its name from "an attributive title," that is, Islam describes anyone who has the attribute of *islam* (surrender), and of being *muslim* (one who has so surrendered), of having surrendered himself to God or resigned his will to God's will in such a way that he experiences the well-being of God's peace.¹ Surrender to God is seen by Muslims as the defining characteristic of their faith, basic to their own sense of identity as Muslims and touchstone to their sense of unity. The question is: Exactly what does surrender to God mean for Muslims?

Straightforward definitions of surrender exist. Perhaps the first to be offered by a Muslim on the street is a practical one: accomplishment of what are called the five "pillars of Islam." One who surrenders to God is one who practices the following divinely ordained acts:

1. *Shahada*, the witness that there is no God but Allah and that Muhammad is his Prophet.
2. *Salat*, the ritual prayers, or worship services, performed daily during five specified intervals.
3. *Zakat*, ritual alms giving based

upon the value of stipulated property.

4. *Sawm*, fasting during daylight hours during the month of Ramadan.

5. *Hajj*, the pilgrimage to Mecca at least once during the lifetime of each Muslim for those who can afford it²

A sixth pillar is sometimes added, *jihad*, which means "'striving, or exertion' in the way of God," either personally by struggle against lack of faith and devotion, or publicly, by preaching, teaching and, if necessary, armed struggle.³ Emphasizing the aspect of day-to-day obedience, these pillars are fundamental requirements of Muslim surrender so basic that there is virtually no disagreement over them among the various branches of Islam.

Nevertheless, when one considers that there are persons widely considered to be Muslims who neglect all but the first pillar for significant parts of their lives, such simple definitions begin to seem illusive. The fact of the matter is that Muslim thought on surrender is more complex, and is the fruit of a history of development by a human community faced with a wide variety of circumstances and decisions over a period of 1400 years. Its full breadth and beauty can be more adequately appreciated by considering, however briefly, some key moments in that history.

Surrender as Uncompromising Obedience

The year is 656, and the third caliph of the new Islamic movement has been murdered. The governor of

Syria, Mu'awiya engages the forces of 'Ali, son-in-law of Muhammad and natural heir to power, in a contest for succession. After two weeks of battle, 'Ali agrees to arbitration of the issue on the basis of the Qur'an. Suddenly, a number of 'Ali's men withdraw from his camp in protest. How is it possible, they ask, that the will of God as revealed in the Qur'an should be mediated by human authorities? How can it be that their hero, 'Ali, should compromise his faith and religious principles by consorting with the followers of a pretender? In negotiating with one who was outside God's will, 'Ali demonstrates that he himself is outside God's will and thus, in fact, neither a true Muslim nor qualified to lead true Muslims.⁴

Those who "went out" (*kharaja*) from 'Ali became the kernel of the Kharijite movement. The dominating characteristic of this movement was the conviction that the faith of a Muslim had to be accompanied by appropriate works or it was no *Islam* at all. Morality was more important than profession of faith since it exposed one's faith. Faithfulness in surrender to God meant single-minded integrity of action as proof of the word, lest faith be proven false. A failure of integrity at any point indicated an incompleteness of surrender, betraying the fact that one was not really the Muslim one professed to be, and Kharijites removed such persons from the community.⁵

The uncompromising character of the Kharijite position was so driving

that the movement splintered, as sect judged fellow-sect unworthy of the name Muslim. In political issues there was no toleration for a ruler who appeared to the faithful to have fallen into sin. In personal matters there was no recourse for error, no mercy or forgiveness. They could not structure a world themselves, and they were hotly pursued for their unyielding criticism of the legitimacy of the world of others. While theirs was not to be the defining position, the passionate insistence of the Kharijites on the totality of surrender undoubtedly reflects the passionate insistence of the Qur'an on the incomparable uniqueness of God. It may be argued that the resurgence of Islamic fundamentalism in our century renews some Kharijite themes.

Surrender as an Inward Belief

Some thirty years have passed since the Kharijites "went out" from 'Ali. The successors of Mu'awiya have not only established their dynasty after the death of 'Ali in 661, but managed to put down a second civil war of dissatisfaction with their leadership. Around every campfire, discussion of the recent war ends with the same debate: Who really should have been caliph back in 'Ali's day? Are these Umayyads God's choice of leadership for Muslims? Should the 'Ali line be returned to power? Maybe some other leader is really the right one? The temptation to be intolerant of rival points of view and create division within the movement is very real, not for Kharijites only, but for the whole Muslim community.⁶

From this time a book has come down to us, written by al-Hasan, grandson of 'Ali entitled *Kitab al-Irja'*, or Book of Deferment. In this book al-Hasan proposed that the question of the rightness or wrongness of each party's candidate should be postponed, or deferred (*irja'*), to God's own ultimate judgment, and that meanwhile Muslims should refrain from declaring themselves on the disputed matter.

Implicit in this concept of postponement was the idea that profession of faith must be taken seriously, even when actions might not seem to all observers to correspond with it. The claim to be a Muslim must be respected on its own merit and not be called into question by actions. By this doctrine al-Hasan was giving opponents on all sides a theological rationale for setting aside judgment on a potentially disruptive issue that was not likely to be resolved soon. Those who accepted this approach came to be known as people of deferment, or Murji'ites.⁷

Eventually, the issue of succession died down, 'Ali was accepted as one of "the four rightly-guided caliphs," and the Murji'ite idea of postponing judgment of rulers ceased to be quite so critical an issue. What remained important, however, was a concept of faith that fundamentally excludes consideration of a person's acts. In the words of Gibbs and Kramers, "a Muslim does not lose his faith through sin," or eschatologically, "where there is faith, sins will do no harm."⁸ "We do not consider anyone to be an infidel on account of sin," declares article one of the Murji'ite confession, *Fikh Aqbar I*.⁹ In effect, *islam* is identified with *iman*: surrender is most essentially a matter of faith. Misinterpretation of religious duty does not negate faith; neither does committing forbidden acts. Erroneous believers and sinful believers are Muslims nonetheless because of their faith. This emphasis on faith came to be the defining hallmark of the Murji'ite movement in contrast to Kharijites with their emphasis on corresponding acts.

Such a definition of surrender had the effect of internalizing its basic nature. It became impossible to establish the presence of true *islam* by empirical observation, so its confession by an individual had to be accepted by the community. God alone could know the posture of the heart, so God alone could judge the true Muslim from the pretender. Thus, it

was a position that relieved the community of the need to make difficult excluding decisions concerning its members. Sociologically, Muslim identity before the community was established by confession of faith, and both believer and community were enabled to pass on to other questions of life and faith beyond the issue of identity. Not only so, a Muslim individual or group confident of their inward belief could respond more resiliently to occasional human failure, knowing that it was not intrinsically related to their identity as Muslims. It is, therefore, perhaps not surprising that the Murji'ite position became widely accepted in Islam as the pragmatic approach to self-definition, even though periodic calls for more moral rigor occurred.

Surrender as a Freely Chosen Human Possibility

Sometime between the years 694 and 699 a man named Hasan al-Basri sits down to write a letter to the caliph. Hasan's views are rumored to be unusual, and the caliph has asked him to account for himself. Carefully Hasan pens a document, still extant, that includes these words:

God creates only good; evil stems from men or from Satan. Man chooses freely between the two; but God knows from all eternity what man will choose. He only "leads him into error"...if man has first given him occasion for this through his sin.¹⁰

Without denying God's will and foreknowledge entirety, Hasan allowed for the possibility of free human choice. Based on Quranic exegesis, he granted that God is determinative not only of external events such as poverty and famine, but also of internal human workings connected with surrender, such as faith and obedience. But most significantly, Hasan also maintained that God determines these only *after* human choice and leading. God's power may be active in the relationship that comes about through surrender, but it is active only as each person chooses to

make it so. This human participation is important for practical piety. When the choice goes awry, the person who made it is responsible for the consequences. God's responsibility in the human realm is limited to that which is good.¹¹

This position came to be known as Qadarite, the idea of limitation of God's power (*qadar*) to permit some semblance of responsible human choice. Although Hasan al-Basri is the first record of such views that we possess, they were apparently not uncommon during the first Islamic centuries. A moderate position, sensitive to Quranic witness, it seems that it was considered by the faithful to be neither particularly unorthodox nor dangerous until its ultimate consequences were realized by the more systematic approach of the Mu'tazilites.¹²

Surrender as Human Response to a Just God

A young disciple of the Hasan al-Basri mentioned above, Wasil ibn-'Ata', sits among a group of men discussing the issue of faith and works. He listens intently as his master is asked just what will become of a grave sinner who is nevertheless a Muslim. The Kharijite answer is, of course, that such a sinner could certainly not be a true Muslim and so was lost forever. The Murji'ite answer, on the other hand, is that, since the name Muslim was dependent upon confession of faith rather than moral uprightness, he must still be destined for paradise. For a Qadarite who affirms a responsible human will, the choice is uncomfortable, and Hasan hesitates between the two possibilities. As he does so, young Wasil, his student, speaks up in his place. "A grave sinner can be classified as neither believer nor unbeliever," he asserts. "For these people there must be some 'intermediate position.'" Vigorous discussion ensues, but

Wasil and others refuse to take the usual sides and finally leave the fellowship of their master, prompting him to say, "He has withdrawn (*i'tazala*) from us."¹³

The group came to be known as the Mu'tazilites (those who have withdrawn), and over the next century their influence in the Muslim world became enormous. Borrowing logical methods from Greek philosophy and applying

Every Muslim knew that the God of the Qur'an was a commanding God, ordaining laws and promising reward or threatening punishment depending on how those laws were fulfilled.

them to Muslim data, Mu'tazilite thinkers systematized Muslim thought in a way most convincing for their age. By 833 their teaching became temporarily the official position of the caliphate in Baghdad and for centuries after retained influential spokes persons for its cause.¹⁴ Though Mu'tazilite thought has long been out of fashion it may be argued that a number of significant modern Muslim thinkers have taken positions that resemble Mu'tazilite points of view.

Behind the idea of an intermediate state lies a powerful sense that God's justice would not assign those to paradise or hell who did not fully deserve them. Though all Muslims hold that God is just, Mu'tazilites gave particular emphasis to the reasoned principle of justice, to the extent that God's justice has been called "their fundamental dogma."¹⁵ Using the analogy of the invisible to the visible, a philosophical principle that one can deduce what is true for the invisible realm by observing what is true for the visible, Mu'tazilites argued that the same apprehension of justice and injustice that is valued by humankind must be valued by God as well. By this principle human moral

law takes on a kind of transcendent quality. That which is perceived to be good on this earth will be seen as good by God and be rewarded accordingly. Likewise with that which is wrong, God will not let it go unpunished. If this be true, then God is not capricious in his dealings with humankind; the fact that he is just in a way intelligible to humankind makes him predictably

so. Mu'tazilites could even describe God as *obliged* to act in a certain way in a certain situation, lest he be proven unjust. With this obligation of God in mind, Mu'tazilites could argue amongst themselves whether God had the power to do that which

was unjust. Indeed, it appeared to some that the omnipotence of God was compromised by this principle of justice.¹⁶

Every Muslim knew that the God of the Qur'an was a commanding God, ordaining laws and promising reward or threatening punishment depending on how those laws were fulfilled. For Mu'tazilites this meant that humankind must have the power to obey those commands, lest the consequences attached to the laws and the God who attached them be shown unjust. Surely God could not justly hold people responsible for deeds they did not have the will or power to commit or refrain from committing. "Obligation and sanction can only be understood in reference to a responsible being."¹⁷ The implication was that God did not coerce, but had given the freedom to humankind to act or not to act in a given situation. The concern for a free human choice prior to divine determination was thus clothed with a theological system that emphasized God's justice.

Implicit in this freedom was real power to act. Since God is the source of all power to act, two important affirma-

tions about the way God gives this power were necessary. First, the power to act must come from God in some way prior to the moment when the action was required so that the individual could be responsible for the way the God-given power was used or not used. Otherwise the action would seem to be God's and not that of the person acting. And secondly, a just God would not give grace (*luff*) inequitably, determining human actions by the amount or kind of grace given.¹⁸ In the name of justice God must give freely and abundantly to all, so that the deciding factor in surrender as in other actions will be not divine economy, but the human response.

Surrender as Divine Gift of an Omnipotent God

It is the middle of a tenth-century night in what is now Iraq. An aspiring teacher of the Mu'tazilite school, awakes suddenly from his sleep and sits bolt upright. Al-Ash'ari has had a dream. In his dream God himself has spoken to him and has called his teaching into question. God has asked him to defend his Mu'tazilite position on the basis of the sayings of Muhammad, and if he cannot, to give it up. This is not the first time al-Ash'ari has had such a dream, and he is shaken. He decides he must abandon a promising career among his Mu'tazilite teachers and take up the position of their opponents. But he will not give up the methods he has learned.

In the years ahead al-Ash'ari would become a powerful champion against the Mu'tazilite teaching using the very logical methods that made those teachings so popular.¹⁹ The school of thought that followed him, the Ash'arites, would come to be regarded as "the most important single school of systematic theology in orthodox Islam,"²⁰ with a wide following into our present day.

Al-Ash'ari predicated his theology upon an affirmation of God's almighty

will. Anything less than a comprehensive divine will seemed to him to attribute to God either "unmindfulness and neglect" or "weakness, impotence, feebleness, and failure to attain His desire."²¹ God revealed himself to be a comprehensively willing God in such Quranic verses as 76:30, "But you shall not will unless God will."²² In al-Ash'ari's understanding, our impression that events happen because other events cause them is an illusion. The real reason for happenings of all sorts is because, moment by moment, "God creates necessary motion."²³

In particular, the kind of human faith and actions that might be involved in surrender cannot be the result of human willing but rather of God's. Al-Ash'ari goes so far as to affirm and offer proof that they are "produced" by God, even "created" by God. The human individual simply "acquires" them from God. By this "doctrine of acquisition" (*kasb*) a person does what he does "in virtue of a created power."²⁴ That power is not his own; it is put in place by God at the very moment it is needed, and not before. There is no time interval in which humans may be in control of it. It is truly at every instance and at the deepest level God's power.

This is not viewed by al-Ash'ari as necessity, because he defines necessity on the basis of what is experienced to be necessary at the level of creaturely perception: "that to which the thing is constrained and compelled and forced, and from which it can find no way to get free or to escape, even though it strive to be freed from it and want to escape from it and exhaust its endeavors to do so."²⁵ There is no struggle in an acquired act, no sense of the involuntary obligation to commit an act that this definition would require. The individual finds that one has the power to do what the individual wants to do and does it, even claiming responsibility for the deed accomplished.²⁶ Whether or not this definition of necessity satisfies the philo-

sophical question of ultimate responsibility, it does in fact satisfy the daily perception and experience of most people who think of themselves as being responsible agents, how ever that power to be responsible came to exist.

Since both what humanly seems good and what humanly seems evil come from God and God alone, then the human creature is forever "either the recipient of a favor for which he must give thanks, or the object of a trial which he must endure patiently."²⁷ One who is surrendered to the will of such a God, then, is one whose life rotates between thankfulness and patient endurance. He believes that God sends moment by moment what he wills, and he accepts it. For Ash'arites it is this quality of belief that is essential for the surrendered attitude before the omnipotent God.

Al Ghazali: Surrender, a Unity of Body and Soul

It is the last half of the tenth century in what is now northeastern Iran, and al-Ghazali is on the search for knowledge of God. He finds he can't believe something just because others have said so (*taqlid*), and he wonders about the elegant logical rationales for proving and defending knowledge (*'aql*) used by the Mu'tazilites and Ash'arites. He yearns for more certainty, and his search leads him to the Muslim mystics, the Sufis, with their mystical intuition of God (*dhawq*). With them he disciplines himself to arrive at that point where "there is no veil between you and [God] except your pre-occupation with aught else."²⁸ This is "union with God" which al-Ghazali afterward described in three ways:

1. The character of the mystic becomes God-like, "as if only God (God's character) is within him."
2. The consciousness of the mystic is so fixed on God in love and adoration that it is aware of nothing else.
3. It is seen that "there is naught

in existence except Allah, that all existence is in His Aspect.”²⁹ This “union means that God and man are in harmony, and that man’s heart reflects God.”³⁰

Yet, even now, with this mystical union, al-Ghazali is not satisfied that he knows God’s inner nature. Through the mystical experience he has gained a sense of assurance of belief, a subjective confidence of belief (*yaqin*), but he is not convinced that he can thereby attain fresh content of belief, fresh illumination from God himself (*wahi*).³¹ For this he returns to the Qur’an. The chasm between the world of humankind and the realm of God yawns wide for al-Ghazali, too wide for reason, too wide for mystical approach. Only God can overcome it, and al-Ghazali believes God has done that miracle in the Qur’an.

Al-Ghazali is remembered by Muslims today not because he had a mystical experience of God. Countless Sufi mystics had gone this way before, proceeding far beyond Ghazali to heterodox experiences of direct contact, unity, and even mystical identity with the Deity. Rather, the accomplishment of al-Ghazali is that he afterwards returned to orthodox Muslim teaching based in the Qur’an and so linked it with his mystical experiences that the warmth and assurance of their approach was made available to orthodox Muslim faithful. He brought Sufism into the heart of surrender to God.

How did he do this? Without entering into his philosophical rationale it may be said that al-Ghazali makes much of the observation that what the body perceives and does profoundly affects the reflective soul, and conversely, what the soul becomes in the process of acquiring experience profoundly affects its use of the body.³² In his own words,

Everyone is undoubtedly influenced by this inter-relation of his mind [soul]

and his body. For assuredly if the mind is perfected and purified it will improve the deeds of the body, so that they too will become commendable. And conversely, if the impressions that are given to the mind by the body are wholesome they will put the mind in a favorable state, and the dispositions will tend to become agreeable. Therefore the way to purify the mind is to make habitual these actions which are completely pure, having in view that when this has become a cus-

For the Muslim... the ultimate aim of devotional acts emerges as love of God and nearness to him.

tom by means of frequent repetition, then the state that has been produced on the mind will become constant.³³

Recognition of purity in actions requires that their meaning be known and reflected upon. Thus it is important that the commendable action be performed in full consciousness of its meaning, so that the full impact on the soul be obtained.

For the Muslim seeker after God this has tremendous significance. It means that devotional acts—in particular, the pillars of Islam prescribed by the Qur’an—must be appreciated for their inward as well as their outward aspects. These aspects correspond to the soul and body of the human individual and are inseparable. It is not possible to perform the devotional acts in a “sound” manner without knowing their deeper meaning and performing it “with single-minded devotion, purity of thought and absolute sincerity,” and al-Ghazali criticized Muslim jurisprudence of the time for allowing it. But neither is it possible to neglect the outward manifestations of the acts in preference for inward and spiritual approaches to God according to the practice of some Sufis. In his synthesis of *shari’a* and Sufis insight al-Ghazali held that the purpose of every act of devotion is the remem-

brance of God by the soul, and therefore “perseverance in [the act] means perseverance in remembrance, as a result of which love of God and intimacy with Him are produced in the soul. Thus, the ultimate aim of devotional acts emerges as love of God and nearness to Him.”³⁴

Al-Ghazali’s surrender must be understood in terms of this twofold

discipline. It is the outward life of obedience to the divinely-commanded ritual and action, accompanied by inward consciousness of its spiritual meaning and intention. Surrender is thus a unity of meaning and action in an

individual’s life that prepares the soul for its blessed eternal existence with God.

The Muslim Concept of Surrender: A Flow of Thought

There is not enough space to pursue other significant moments of the Islamic story. One could discuss surrender as an outward manifestation of an inner love (Ibm Taymiyya), or surrender as a courageous struggle for personal growth in intensity and mastery of the universe (Muhammad Iqbal). One could consider how daring new efforts to understand surrender continue to be attempted in response to the challenges and possibilities of the modern situation. But perhaps enough has been said to demonstrate the vitality of the concept. It is not so much a vocabulary term to be understood as it is a river of thought, flowing across the varied landscape of Muslim history, to be pondered and appreciated. In its simplicity it can be grasped by a child: awed acknowledgment of God’s uniqueness. In its straight forwardness it can be applied by the working day world: obedience to God’s ordinances. In its significance it can be relished at length by theologian and philosopher, for its ramifications touch all aspects of life.

The concept of surrender to God invites consideration by Christians and those of other religious persuasions, for the struggles for self-understanding that are played out around this theme in the Muslim theater of history are often the very same struggles that we have experienced ourselves. In surrender to God we see devout people wrestling with theological questions that are our own: the relationship between faith and good works, the awareness of power versus a sense of human responsibility, the relationship of theology and our practice of the faith, etc. What makes it so interesting is that Muslims have done their wrestlings and built their reflections with quite a different set of data in quite a different set of circumstances. Those of us whose faith is different will surely have a better understanding of ourselves and our faith in God for having sought to understand Muslims in their surrender to him.

End Notes

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34. Quasem, *Ethics of al-Ghazali*, 47-48. See also Umar-ud-Din, *Ethical Philosophy of al-Ghazzali* (Lahore: Sh. Muhammad Ashraf, 1972) 163. "...The 'Ibadat [ordinances for worship] have been ordained only for achieving the remembrance of God, and if this object is not realized, there is no value in Salat [prayer ritual]."

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The Great Muslim Challenge

Learning from Their Dedication

As we look at the Islamic challenge, at their dedication, consecration and obedience, there is much that Muslims can teach us concerning our faith and walk as Christians. Not only can and should we pray for them, but also pray with them.

by J. Christy Wilson, Jr.

In Romans 15:20 the apostle Paul says, “I have made it my goal to preach Christ where He was not known.” Yet today, less than 2% of the Protestant Church’s missionary personnel are working among Muslims, who form the largest unreached people bloc in the world. Over a billion are following a false absolute, a false prophet and a false hope, expecting to have salvation and eternal life through a works oriented religion. In Romans 3:21 the Bible clearly states that no one will be justified by the works of the law. Yet we Christians have done so little to reach the Muslims.

Evangelism is Essential

I remember coming back from Afghanistan to bring our oldest daughter to enter Wheaton as a freshman in 1969. At that time I was able to attend the North American Congress on Evangelism headed by Billy Graham, in Minneapolis. While there I heard Dr. James Kennedy, who had a special meeting for ministers. Since I was the pastor of the Community Christian Church in Kabul—an international congregation there—I was able to attend. There were over 600 pastors. He asked, how many of us, either in a Bible school, a Christian college, or a seminary, had had a course that taught how to lead someone to Christ. Out of over 600 pastors, only three hands went up. He said, “Do you see? We are emphasizing all kinds of good things in our training, but we have left out the most important.” When our Lord formed His school and called His disciples, He said, “Follow Me, and I will make you become fishers of men, (and women)” and that is what He did. That was His main goal.

At that time, I didn’t realize I’d be teaching in a seminary; I planned to spend the rest of my life in Afghanistan. But I determined that if I ever taught in a Christian school I would teach a course on personal evangelism because I didn’t learn it in seminary; I learned it from a Christian layman who was a businessman. He would come to the secular university where I was and have a Bible study, and the students would argue with him; and he would not only turn to the Bible to talk with them, but he would lead them to Christ. That’s how I learned to lead people to the Lord. I taught at Gordon-Conwell—but I had a hard time trying to get faculty to pass a requirement to have evangelism taught regularly in the M.Div. program.

It’s thrilling to see that one of Dr. McGavran’s last books was on evangelism, a subject so vital. We must recognize the immense importance of Christians learning how to lead others to Christ. That is our task!

That is why I was thrilled with the emphasis that Dr. Wang gave concerning AD 2000 at a recent ISFM Conference. He asked the same questions that he asked at the Lausanne Congress II in Manila. “How many of you believe the world can be evangelized by the year 2000?” When he asked that question about 10% said, “Yes, it is possible.” Then he asked it a second time, and about 20% said it was. The third time there were about 30%. But as Dr. Ralph Winter has pointed out, it doesn’t mean that it necessarily *will* happen. It is possible, if we Christians will really get on the job of doing what the Lord has told us to do in world evangelization.

Learning from Muslims

As we look at the Islamic challenge, it is important for us to recognize that they have a lot to teach us in their dedication. Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini used to spend two and a half hours a day at prayer, even with all his responsibilities. He prayed five times a day, a half hour each time, completing the ablutions, and then going through the prayers. Their prayer is not like Christian prayer or intercession. Their prayers are rote sayings of the first chapter of the Qur’an—repeating it over and over again.

But Muslims put many of us to shame with their dedication to prayer and fasting. Many of them don’t eat or drink anything from early morning, at dawn, all through the day, until sunset. They don’t even take medicines, not even aspirins. Many Christians have forgotten all about fasting; and yet, our Lord said that when the Bridegroom would leave, His disciples would fast. In the Sermon on the Mount He said, “When you fast,” He didn’t say, “If you fast.” So Islam’s dedication in prayer and fasting is a great challenge to us.

Muslim Christology

Islam also challenges us in relation to christology. Islam believes far more about Christ than liberal “Christians.” Muslims believe in the virgin birth and that Jesus was perfect and without sin. They believe in His miracles, that He was raised the dead, that He gave new eyes to the blind, new limbs to the lame. They believe that Jesus foretold the future that He ascended to heaven and that He’s alive in heaven right now. They also believe in His second coming.

For that reason, it is so important not only to pray for Muslims, but also to pray *with* them. That's the great way to touch their hearts, because they don't know how to get answers to intercession for real needs by means of their rote prayers toward Mecca. We Christians, as we pray with them in the name of Christ, can lead them to the Lord. I've seen many Muslims come to Christ through Christians who would pray with them—not just for them. They believe that Christ is alive in heaven, and therefore you can pray to Him.

A Heresy of Christianity

The two main reasons that Islam is a heresy of Christianity is that they deny the deity of our Lord Jesus Christ—and that was mainly the fault of Christians! None of the Bible was translated into Arabic until 80 years after Mohammed had died. Yet Arabic was the only language Mohammed knew and therefore he had no chance to know the Bible in the one language that he knew. That's why in the Qur'an there are many references to the Bible—he had heard a lot of biblical stories—but there are no quotations of the Bible in the Qur'an. Islam arose in the Arabic context mainly as a failure of Christians missions to that region of the world.

In Mecca before Islam took root, every day they would pray to many idols. Mohammed saw that this was wrong. He had come across Christians in route in his caravan that went from Mecca to Medina, Jerusalem, and Damascus and back. He had contact with Christians. But he saw them worshipping statues of Mary instead of worshipping Jesus. He thought the Christian Trinity was God the Father, Mary the Mother, and Jesus the Son, and that's essentially what Muslims think today. When they ask you, "Do you believe Jesus is the Son of God?" and you say, "Yes," they think that you believe that God had sexual relations with Mary and produced Jesus the Son,

and that the Christian Trinity is a "Holy Family." So again it essentially is a failure of true missions. At the root of the problem to reach Muslims for Christ lies the failure to communicate the true Gospel message.

Islam denies not only the deity of Christ, but also the death of Christ. Muslims say that Jesus was too good a man for God to allow Him to die ignominiously on a cross. Instead, according to them, God caused the likeness of Jesus to fall on Judas and that Judas was the one who was captured and crucified, while Jesus ascended to heaven before the crucifixion. In this way Islam cuts the heart out of the Gospel of salvation.

One great Muslim scholar, Hajji Sutta Muhammad who had been to Mecca on a pilgrimage, came to Christ because he saw that only through Christ could his sins be forgiven. That is the great truth that the followers of Islam need to recognize.

Muslims not only are a challenge to christology, but they're also a challenge demographically, because there are so many of them in the world today. One out of every three unreached persons is a Muslim. For that reason I was concerned when I read the plans for the Congress in Seoul, Korea for GCOWE'95. At that time I mentioned to Dr. Thomas Wang the fact that in the Consultation there was nothing focused on the great Muslim challenge. Although there was a strong clear focus on unreached people groups in general, however, the majority bloc of unreached peoples are Muslims; two thirds of the nations in the 10/40 Window are Islamic. Yet there was no specific focus on this tremendous problem and challenge as such which George Otis calls the "greatest last giant." He wonderfully compares the occupation of the Holy Land, and the giants that were in the way then, to the evangelization of the world today and the giants that are opposing us today. He says that Islam is the greatest giant. I

wholeheartedly agree with him!

Theologically we need to study means of effectually reaching Muslims peoples for Christ. But we also need to send people to these groups. I am thrilled with what is happening now as many more Christians are studying Islam and are going to unreached Muslim peoples. I am also deeply impressed with the work Dr. Ralph Winter has done in mobilizing Christians to reach the unreached peoples of the world.

Evangelism by Muslims

As to the Muslim challenge, Dr. Wang has said, we have an evangelistic responsibility. Muslims put us to shame with their evangelism and even with their use of tentmaking witnesses. In a recent conference in Los Angeles the Muslims declared their goal to lead 70 million Americans to Islam. That is their evangelistic aim for this country.

They also have an eschatology that the whole world is going to become Muslim some day. They teach that Jesus Christ is coming back, at which time He will tell all the Christians that Mohammed was really the true prophet. At that point He is going to make Muslims of all Christians. After that He's going to die. They already have a grave for Him next to Mohammed's in Medina.

Muslims are also a challenge to us in relation to religious liberty. For them it is a one-way street: They don't allow religious liberty in their own Islamic countries because any Muslim that leaves that religion is supposed to be killed. This is in spite of the fact that the United Nations Declaration of Human Rights states that everybody should have freedom to express his or her own faith and decide what he or she wants to believe. Nevertheless, Muslims demand religious liberty in non-Muslim countries.

A Challenge to our Lethargy

Another challenge to Christians is our own lethargy. It is amazing how few Christians are working with Muslims, even in our country. Dr. William McElwee Miller, one of the greatest missionaries to Muslims, just passed away last year at 100. He spent 43 years in Iran and led hundreds of Muslims to Christ. He said: "The reason there are so few converts to Christ from Islam is not so much because of the perversity of the fish as it is because of the paucity of the fishers." In other words, if we had more fishing going on in the Muslim world for Christ, we would be leading more Muslim peoples to Him.

I'll never forget explaining the Gospel to a man in Afghanistan who heard it for the first time. When he understood it, he said, "Why hasn't anyone told me this before?" That's what over a billion Muslims can say. "Why hasn't anyone told us before?"

Muslims challenge us in the area of mortality and sacrifice. To work among for the Lord in Muslim contexts is truly a life and death matter! And our Lord pointed this out very clearly. He said, "Be faithful unto death, and I will give you a crown of everlasting life." (Rev. 2:10)

Just a few years ago two very close friends of ours were martyred for Christ in Iran. One was a Presbyterian minister that I knew well, who also had been head of the Bible Society in Teheran, as well as pastor of the Evangelical American Church there. He was martyred.

Then there was Mehdi Dibaj, who became a missionary from Iran to Afghanistan. When he was in Afghanistan, he invited a Muslim convert to his room for dinner. They were having

such wonderful fellowship, praying and praising the Lord that they delayed eating their supper. The cat got into the meat and ate it instead. Then this cat suddenly went into convulsions and died. Someone had poisoned the meat to kill Mehdi Dibaj and his Muslim convert friend.

Mehdi Dibaj went back to Iran after being a missionary in Afghanistan. Because he himself was a Muslim convert, he was arrested under Khomeini's fundamentalist regime and put into a box just three feet wide so he couldn't lie down. He spent two years praying in that box. Finally, they let him out into the general prison. He spent his time reading the Bible, like John Bunyan, and praying. He led over 1,000 Muslims to Christ in prison! The government officials were at their wit's end. They didn't know what to do. So they tried him on December 3, 1993. Some of you have seen his defense. It reminds one of Paul's defense before Agrippa, because it is like Scripture from the beginning to the end. Because of his faith he was convicted to be hung on January 15, 1994.

The Iranians did not realize the power of fax transmissions because his message got all over the world by this means. I even sent a fax to President Rafsanjani saying how wrong it was to kill this person who had become a Christian pastor. Instead of being executed on January 15 as convicted and tried, he was released. On January 16 he went to church for the first time in ten years, and what great rejoicing there was having him in the service.

Then the pastor, who welcomed him into his home that following Wednesday, disappeared. His body was found 11 days later. At this pastor's funeral,

Mehdi Dibaj said, "He has stolen my martyr's crown." However, a few months later Mehdi Dibaj also disappeared and was killed.

Since the *Taliban* (from the Arabic word for "theological students" or "disciples") have conquered the southern half of Afghanistan, prayers need to be offered in a special way for that nation. This fundamentalist Muslim group has closed all schools for girls, do not permit women to work out of the home, are forcing men to grow beards at least five inches long and will not allow boys to fly kites, saying that they should be studying the Qu'ran instead. Let us claim Psalm 2:8, "Ask of me (the Father) and I will give you (the Son) the nations (including Afghanistan) as your inheritance and the uttermost parts of the earth as your possession."

God has called us to take the Gospel to the whole world. Securing our salvation involved death for Jesus Christ. His followers are not exempt. It was God's will that our Lord die, and rise again, and ascend into heaven, and send the Holy Spirit to evangelize His world. We, like the apostle Paul, have been given the responsibility to preach the Gospel where Christ is not known and to do it with great dedication even if it means giving our lives.

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Planting the Church Underground in Muslim Contexts

Rediscovering a biblical paradigm for effective and fruitful church planting in environments hostile to Christianity.

by Joshua Massey

An enraged mob of Muslims in Nigeria brutally behead a Christian, placing his freshly decapitated head upon a spear to lead their procession through the city as they shout “Allah Akbar!” [God is great!] The rampage doesn’t stop until nine churches are burned, two pastors killed, and 165 Christians injured.¹ An evangelical church in Chad is attacked in broad daylight by a group of about 600 young Muslims. The church’s bookshop is completely robbed and everything in the church is destroyed.²

Could these tragedies have been avoided? While such carnage is far from commonplace in the Muslim world today, we are hearing more and more reports of persecuted Christians in Islamic lands. For instance, Muslims who convert to another religion in Sudan are subject to capital punishment. In the summer of 1994, four Sudanese Muslim converts to Christianity were executed by crucifixion. An Egyptian Christian, active in evangelism in upper Egypt, was shot dead in front of his family by Islamic zealots, who have also destroyed Christian homes, fields, shops and churches. In addition to the government-sponsored execution of several Muslim converts to Christianity in Iran, key Christian leaders there have been mysteriously abducted and martyred. In 1991 Pakistan passed a law requiring capital punishment for anyone “blaspheming” the name of Muhammad, giving Muslims alternative opportunities to settle disputes with Christian neighbors. Rather than deal legitimately with economic or land disputes, Muslims can merely accuse Christians of blasphemy. Even if the Christian is not killed by a mob before trial, a

Christian’s testimony in Pakistani courts is worth only half of a Muslim’s.

We don’t often reflect on the uncomfortable reality that Muslims see the same phenomenon in Christian dominated lands where Muslims are a minority. Consider the case of Serbian “Christians” opening concentration camps and massacring thousands of Bosnian Muslims under the banner of “ethnic cleansing” in 1992. Not content with such savage genocide, Serbians “Christians” raped and impregnated thousands of Muslim women as a matter of policy.

Most Muslims citizens throughout the Islamic world are certainly not hostile towards Christians; however, we cannot but be concerned when Christians become targets for violence. The silent voice of such persecuted believers is seldom heard. Merely “raising their voice” often increases their vulnerability. Occasionally the news reaches us in the West as a plea to defend our fellow Christians by lobbying politically to withdraw financial aid from the same governments who, actively or passively, tolerate such human rights abuses. Major initiatives at the national level in the United States are commencing as never before. Sometimes we also hear of opportunities to assist victims with funds to provide supplies, replace burned books and rebuild demolished churches.

While we find many faithful disciples for Jesus in these lands, truly loving the very Muslim parties responsible for their torment, we are not as well acquainted with the even more prominent fact that the overwhelming majority of Christians in these Muslim lands don’t seem too concerned with reaching

their Muslim neighbors for Christ. When the faithful among them plead with these Christians to consider outreach to Muslims, reminding them that the consequence for their apathy may mean hell for Muslims, more than a few have said “Good! Hell is the best place for them!” Enduring many generations of unjust discrimination and sometimes even bloody hostility, it’s not hard to understand why many who call themselves Christians would love to see their Muslim neighbors go to hell. However, we must ask: What has happened to the church in these lands? Surely, few in the Western world can even imagine the painful effects of growing up as a religious minority in a land where offending the religious sentiments of a Muslim can result in the death penalty. And yet, we must ask: What is this social organization whose members publicly call themselves “Christians” who tell their sons and daughters with utmost seriousness, “Never trust a Muslim!”

Laws forbidding Christians from purchasing land to build churches, banning Christian children from government-financed education, and special taxes on Christians, these are some of the most common forms of socio-economic persecution. But did the apostles or our early church fathers lobby the political authorities for the right to erect public church buildings? Did the followers of Christ during Nero’s reign even openly identify themselves as “Christians”? Furthermore, what does all this have to do with how we establish churches among Muslim peoples today?

To answer these questions, let us take a brief look at the history of the

church, taking special note of how early Christians experienced continued growth amidst deadly hostility, what factors may be responsible for changing this apostolic pattern of growth, and how we might apply these historical lessons today in our outreach to Muslims.

Growth in the Early Church

When the church was established at Pentecost in A.D. 30, it was seen by both Jews and Gentiles as a Jewish sect. Persecution of believers therefore came primarily from Jews who objected to their doctrine and their admission as Gentiles who did not observe the Law. In A.D. 35, the church went underground after Stephen's martyrdom. Jewish leaders began going from house to house to drag followers of "The Way" off to prison—they were not yet called "Christians" until about six years later.³ Stephen, as a Hellenist, spoke Greek and adopted a freer life-style than conservative Jews. It is interesting to note that while Jewish persecution of "The Way" did affect Jewish disciples of Christ in Jerusalem, the outburst was particularly aimed at the more "liberal" Hellenists. But rather than stop the growth of the church, this wave of persecution only fulfilled Jesus' words by thrusting more witnesses into "Judea, Samaria and the ends of the earth" (Acts 1:8). Philip, another Hellenist, brought the Gospel to the half-Jewish Samaritans and saw a great harvest (Acts 8).

Although early followers of Jesus referred to themselves as "Jews," "followers of the Way," "brethren," "disciples," "the faithful," "elect," "saints," "believers," and "the household of God," unbelievers referred to them as "Nazarenes," "Galileans," and "Jes-saeans."⁴ By A.D. 41, there were so many Gentiles who had joined The Way that people started calling them "Messiah-nuts" (the likely idiomatic connotation of the Greek term "Christian").⁵ Perhaps the term arose in Antioch because the behavior of Gentile believers,

in contrast to Jewish followers of The Way, was so "non-Jewish" that they could hardly be called a sect of Judaism. Yet because of the enduring presence of Jewish believers, what we call "Christianity" today was seen as a sect, or possibly a "cult", of Judaism even as late as A.D. 59 (Acts 24:5, 14).

Under the wing of Judaism, The Way enjoyed the same rights and privileges which Roman law bestowed upon the highly respected Jewish minority. Therefore, followers of The Way, like Jews, were exempt from the cult of emperor-worship. But as the number of Gentile believers kept increasing, it became more and more difficult to tag along with the Jewish community. Eventually, the privileges given to Jews by Rome began slipping away from Gentile believers.

The refusal of The Way to burn even a pinch of incense to the divine Emperor was seen as unpatriotic. The Roman position toward believers therefore grew worse and worse. In July 64, followers of The Way entered a severe period of persecution when Nero used them, according to the Roman historian Tacitus, as a scapegoat to shift blame for the fires of Rome away from himself—rumor held Nero started the fire which destroyed much of Rome.

First those who confessed to being Christians were arrested. Then, on information obtained from them, hundreds were convicted, more for their anti-social beliefs than for their fire-raising. In their deaths they were made a mockery. They were covered in the skins of wild animals, torn to death by dogs, crucified or set on fire—so that when darkness fell they burned like torches in the night. Nero opened up his gardens for this spectacle and gave a show in the arena. (Annals-15.44)

The final event to polarize disciples of Jesus as an independent people separate from Jews occurred during the Jewish revolt against Rome in 66-73. Rather than use this Jewish revolt as an opportunity to avenge their oppressors under Nero, who ruled until 68, most

believers completely disassociated themselves from Judaism. Their refusal to join Jews in this revolt led to Jewish perceptions of believers as national enemies. From this point on, few Jews joined The Way.

The cry of martyrs in the Book of Revelation gives us a glimpse of the persecution that followed in the province of Asia under Domitian (81-96):

"How long, Sovereign Lord, holy and true, until you judge the inhabitants of the earth and avenge our blood? They were told to wait a little longer, until the number of their fellow-servants and brothers who were to be killed as they had been was completed. (Rev. 6:10-11)

By the early second century, public profession of "Christianity" was a capital offense. If a person was found to be a Christian, they were given opportunity to renounce their faith—execution awaited those who would not deny their Lord. Martyrs would kneel blindfolded, awaiting decapitation by sword. Bishops and church leaders were brought to Rome for execution. Grasque mentions that the legal grounds for the persecution of Christians during the second century were often obscure,

Apparently, simply to bear the name "Christian" was a crime, probably because rejection of the gods of the Romans was felt to threaten the peace and prosperity that the gods were believed to bring. Refusal to worship the Emperor could also be taken as a sign of treason.⁶

Decius (249-251) gave an imperial edict commanding all citizens of the empire to make sacrifices to the Roman gods. Certificates were given as evidence of obedience to the edict. Some Christians obtained certificates from sympathetic pagan neighbors, or corrupt officials, without actually performing the sacrifices. Others complied to avoid execution. Sporadic persecutions continued. Emperor Diocletian issued four severe edicts against Christianity in 303. A large number of Christians and their entire town in Asia Minor were

destroyed by soldiers. Christians of Palestine, Egypt, and Syria seem to have been targeted with the most intense persecution.

The Underground Church of Jerusalem

Rather than annihilate the church, it seems that periods of persecution only drove the church underground, where its number could slowly but steadily increase unnoticed by its enemies. Acts 9:26-27 teaches us several lessons about how the underground church of the first century operated:

When he [Paul] had come to Jerusalem, he attempted to join the disciples; and they were all afraid of him, for they did not believe that he was a disciple. But Barnabas took him, brought him to the apostles, and described for them how on the road he had seen the Lord, who had spoken to him, and how in Damascus he had spoken boldly in the name of Jesus.

We see from these verses that Paul's first attempts to find the disciples failed because they were afraid of him. He was an outsider, not privy to the knowledge of where believers met. No one trusted him enough to give him that confidential information, lest they gullibly mistake his profession of faith and end up becoming an accomplice to the massacre of the whole underground church in Jerusalem. Those unwilling to help Paul locate the disciples probably suspected him of trying to deceptively infiltrate their trusted network so he could continue to imprison and persecute the saints for which he was well known (Acts 25:10-11).

Years had passed since Paul's conversion on his way to Damascus, but it seems that confirmed reports of such news never made it to Jerusalem, or perhaps the disciples dismissed such reports as deceptive rumors designed to trick them into trusting Paul someday—as he was now requesting. Paul probably asked around discreetly, trying to find a

disciple who could introduce him to the community of believers, where he could also meet the apostles. But no one believed his testimony. No one believed he had truly become a follower of Jesus, not until he found Barnabas.

According to Gal. 1:18-19, it appears that Barnabas probably met with Peter

This pattern of meeting from house to house is well suited for hostile environments. If outsiders do not know where believers will meet from week to week, how can they raid their meetings?

and James (and maybe other disciples) seeking permission to bring Paul into their midst so they could examine his testimony to verify for the whole church that Paul was indeed now a genuine disciple of Jesus. Barnabas, also called an apostle (Acts 14:14), was a trusted man of great integrity. A.T. Robertson, in his classic work on Greek word pictures in the New Testament, notes that Paul's visit to Peter came not only after his endorsement from Barnabas, but probably while Paul was preaching in Jerusalem. In other words, Paul may have been under observation to quell their suspicion before agreeing to meet him. Peter and James eventually did consent to meet Paul, probably in a neutral location, not one of the secret sites where believers met together. In contrast to the fearful disciples, Peter and James were the brave ones who volunteered to take the risk and responsibility of evaluating Paul's testimony so that no one else need expose their identities to such a distrusted newcomer.

If Robertson is correct about the fact that Peter and James granted an audience with Paul only after observing his bold preaching, we can only imagine what Paul might have been thinking as he

labored to demonstrate that his faith was genuine: "I'm not lying! I really am a disciple of Jesus! Would an infiltrating spy risk his life by talking to Grecian Jews so boldly? Watch this!" According to Acts 9:28-30, Paul debated the Hellenistic Jews so aggressively that they tried to kill him! Threats upon his life were so serious that the disciples evacuated Paul to

Caesarea and then sent him off to Tarsus! Paul passed his test with flying colors! He was now accorded the trust to fellowship with the disciples at Jerusalem.

The Apostolic Model

Christians of the first three centuries did not meet in special church buildings. To do so would only have invited their

destruction. Rather, they met in private homes, as was the custom recorded in the New Testament. This pattern of meeting from house to house is well suited for hostile environments. If outsiders do not know where believers will meet from week to week, how can they raid their meetings?

Archaeological evidence suggests that the first actual church buildings began to emerge in the middle of the third century during one of many peaceful interludes between persecution. After over two hundred years of underground growth—when Christians were on their way to becoming a majority population in some areas—a handful of fellowships could finally gather as many as one hundred people under the same roof. Still, the evidence points to the fact that the overwhelming majority of Christians met in small and quiet house-based fellowships until the beginning of the fourth century.

The New Testament requirement of elders being "able to teach" also provides a healthy grassroots, guerrilla-style ecclesiology to insure continued growth amidst deadly persecution since they will be able to shepherd the splin-

ter groups that scatter if some of a fellowship's leaders are executed.

Before Stephen's martyrdom, it was generally known where followers of The Way lived. But during the periodic persecutions which forced the church to go underground, the identity of believers became less public and more private. Newcomers did not gain entry into the community of believers until leaders were convinced that either their faith was genuine or, at least, that they were earnestly interested in learning more about the Way of God (Acts 18:26). Given that inquirers put themselves at risk just by being associated with The Way, screening out impostors was not as perplexing as one might imagine.

Church Growth Amidst Secrecy

One might ask: How did the church grow so rapidly if public identification as a "Christian" was a crime punishable by death? Asked another way: How did believers evangelize without the opponents of the church discovering they were "Christians"? The open-air preaching we read about in Acts became a hazardous style of evangelism after Nero's persecution, and is seldom mentioned in the second and third centuries. While the early apostles enjoyed preaching in synagogues, this method of evangelism was no longer an option when followers of The Way refused to join in the Jewish revolt against Rome (66-73), completing the polarization of Christians as a distinct people, no longer considered a sect of Judaism.

The underground church of the first three centuries grew primarily by what we today call "personal" and "life-style" evangelism. Christians were not silent about their faith, just selective about who they shared it with. In a society where integrity, honesty, and sexual purity were not commonplace, Christians stood out as people to be trusted. When a plague broke out in Alexandria, Christians stayed behind to tend the sick and bury the dead while most everyone else fled.

Persecution was sporadic; it didn't hammer the church for three solid centuries. The church enjoyed some mobility and tolerance during several rather lengthy periods of peace in the second and third century when classes for inquirers could actually be held in neutral locations. But when persecution was renewed, most Christians maintained a very low profile to avoid unnecessary suffering. They had even developed secret symbols to identify themselves as Christian to other believing strangers. The fish symbol, popular among Christians even today, was probably used because the Greek word for fish (ICHTHUS) formed the acrostic: *Iesous CHristos THEou Uios Soter* (Jesus Christ, God's Son, Savior), serving both as a secret symbol and a concise summary of Christian belief. A dove, shepherd, and even a special sailor's anchor (which revealed a cross to Christian insiders) also served as secret symbols to help strangers recognize other brothers and sisters in Christ. But unlike today in the West, such symbols were effective to assist the networking of early believers precisely because outsiders had no clue of their hidden meaning.

Even with such an elaborate underground system of secrecy, many Christians were discovered. Perhaps they shared their faith with someone who betrayed their confidence; or maybe they were the bold ones who exercised less caution in their witness. But rather than discourage church growth, the public display of Christian martyrdoms only seems to have achieved the very opposite. In view of the relative few Christians who renounced their faith, unbelievers could only admire the supernatural peace of those who willingly laid down their lives for the One who was executed for them. Tertullian wrote "the blood of the martyrs is seed." As foreign as it might seem to us today, many believers were actually enthusiastic about the prospects of martyrdom. Ignatius, bishop of Antioch, actually begged Christians in Rome

to avoid any attempts at preventing his execution. According to Eusebius, just before Polycarp was burned alive he blessed God in public prayer for counting him worthy in the number of martyrs to partake of Christ's cup.⁷

This special number of martyrs has its likely origin rooted in Rev. 6:10-11. As a boy in Alexandria, Origen had to be forcibly restrained by his mother from joining the martyrs in their suffering. Martyrdom was seen by many as a high privilege to fellowship with Christ in His suffering (John 15:13; Php. 3:10; 1 Pet. 4:13). Those who were martyred before baptism were seen as experiencing a "better baptism in blood." Smith notes, "The sufferings of the martyrs at Lyons and Vienne in A.D. 177 encouraged several bystanders to declare themselves Christians, even though it meant almost certain death for them too."⁸

People were intrigued by a community whose hope could not be extinguished. Believers quietly and steadily multiplied in number and influence. By the middle of the third century, a minority Christian community existed in almost every province of the empire. Historians note how intense persecution in the late third century actually helped purge the church of its more lukewarm members.⁹

So what was the result of nearly 250 years of "covert" and "clandestine" underground church operations amidst such deadly hostility? It meant phenomenal growth! By AD 300, Christians actually formed a majority in several provinces of Asia Minor and Africa. And then, like a new chapter for Acts, which chronicles the victorious arrival of the church in Rome, the year 312 saw a decisive victory as the church *conquered* the Empire when Emperor Constantine himself became a Christian.

The Post-Constantine Church

With the Edict of Milan, Christianity became an officially tolerated religion

of the Empire in 313 and Christians finally enjoyed the freedom to worship and to publicly identify themselves as Christians without fear of persecution. Such freedom gave opportunity for dramatic changes what Christians did and especially in the way Christians gathered for worship. Large and impressive churches were soon built throughout the Empire. In 395 Christianity actually became the *only* official state religion. But was this official acceptance really a victory for the church and its mission?

Linder, Professor of History at Kansas State University, comments on this period of church history:

Many historians feel that the acceptance of Christianity during the fourth century as the official state religion seriously damaged spirituality, as Christian leaders became confidants of emperors. Others go further, and interpret this period as the “fall of the church” from its apostolic purity—as the beginnings of a new era in which the issue of the right relationship between the church and state had to be resolved.¹⁰

While thousands, no doubt, became new members of the church with genuine spiritual repentance, thousands more came into the church because Christianity was now “respectable”—it being the religion of the Emperor! Like good citizens emulating the preferences of their ruler, many probably entered the church as the “fashionable” thing to do.

So while it may appear that Christianity was on the brink of even greater victories, says Linder, history shows that as Christianity swept across the Greco-Roman world, it lost some of its original zeal, as well as much of its earliest simplicity.¹¹ Nominalism and lukewarmness became endemic. With the threat of persecution now removed, calling oneself a Christian in the post-Constantine era cost very little.

Whereas in the past, persecution purged the church of its lukewarm members, the absence of persecution now ushered in an era of lukewarm Christianity unknown in prior church history. Although commonly used to describe many who identify themselves as Christians today, the word “hypocrite” was not likely a term used for Christians during the first three centuries—they knew all too well that the cost of following Jesus could require their own lifeblood.

The thorough examination of genuine

The church structures established under the Protestant thrust of the nineteenth century weren't much different. Henry Venn pointed to a kind of religious imperialism that was reluctant to establish truly indigenous churches...

faith before admittance into an underground church combined with threat of martyrdom has a strange way of weeding out those who aren't serious about following Jesus! But all this changed in the post-Constantine era. The simplicity of church leadership through elders was replaced by a highly sophisticated and institutional ecclesiastical order. House-fellowships were replaced first by synagogue-type clusters of worshiping households (*ekklesias*), and later by elaborate and expensive architectural masterpieces.

Islam and Underground Reformers

Ironically, not long after Christianity became the only official state religion, the Western half of the Roman empire began precipitous decline until it collapsed during the fifth century. The widespread nominalism of the church combined with the long-standing anti-Roman

spirit across North Africa and Semitic areas of the Middle East provided fertile ground for Islam in the late seventh and early eighth centuries.

Not until the ninth and tenth centuries do we see any significant spiritual renewal in the Western church, attempting to raise the spiritual level of those who called themselves “Christians.” Along with such renewal, numerous groups emerged calling for a return to “apostolic” Christianity, denouncing the worldliness and corruption of the church. During the twelfth century, whole areas of Europe began to demand the “purification” of the church. However, such people were quickly branded as heretics.

Chief among the heresies of the Waldensians was their “unauthorized” preaching of the Bible and their rejection of the clergy as mediators. Waldensians believed anyone could perform communion, not just those who have ascended to high ecclesiastical orders. Waldensians also rejected the doctrine of purgatory, for which they found no biblical evidence. But now, rather than angry Jews or pagan Romans killing these “heretical” Christians, “Christian” mobs began burning such believers at the stake. By the early thirteenth century, capital punishment for such heretics became official papal policy—a policy which Protestants also adopted later when their turn came to quell dissent, diversity and purification.

The Waldensians avoided extinction by fleeing to inaccessible European alpine valleys. Such a retreat from society is in great contrast to an underground church whose members scatter to *populated* regions where their anonymity allows greater mobility to spread the gospel. Fleeing to unpopulated areas, on the other hand, can result in a kind of isolation where the church grows only by procreation. Those who opt not to flee

during persecution, as the apostles did in Jerusalem, may do so to slowly and quietly introduce change, staying out of the public eye by going “underground” until things calm down. But in fairness to the Waldensians, they probably had fewer options than the early church whose persecution took time to spread outside of Jerusalem. In spite of their retreat to lonely alpine valleys, Waldensians helped lay a solid foundation for the Protestant movement by exchanging ideas with John Wycliff, who produced the first English translation of the Latin Bible.

Wycliff, condemned as a heretic in 1380, taught that Christians could interpret the Bible for themselves. Wycliff’s Lollard movement went underground in 1414 amidst strong persecution as heretics, but Lollardry had already deeply influenced the teaching of John Huss. Both Wycliff and Huss are seen as forerunners to the Protestant Reformation which also adopted many Waldensian beliefs. Recognizing the spiritual richness of these so called “heretical” reformist groups, many devout Catholics gradually attempted to introduce a similar spiritual depth into the church through monasticism and mysticism. But it could not be stopped, the Protestant Reformation arrived in the early sixteenth century.

So, it seems that the church—or at least parts of it—came full circle. Starting as a sect of Judaism that soon went underground in the first century amidst deadly Jewish and Roman hostility; enjoying a lengthy period of post-Constantine peace from the fourth century when covert worship was no longer necessary; returning underground once again as heretical reformist sects in the fifteenth century amidst more deadly persecution; then gradually reemerging into another post-Constantine-like era of peace after the heretical Protestant reformists reached a majority in certain regions in Europe, usually alongside political opposition to the Holy Roman

emperor. To comment on when Protestantism actually achieved the status of a “tolerated religion” among Catholics (or vice versa) would surely be a subject of considerable debate, just as many untolerated sects within Protestantism might assert that “post-Constantine-like peace” existed only for the self-appointed caretakers of the faith whose numbers were large enough to form a majority.

It is interesting to note the economic factors associated with persecution. One of the first things Christians did after massacring Waldensian Christians was to seize their land and church properties—perhaps the Waldensians didn’t learn the lesson of apostolic Christianity as well as they thought! The ownership of such valuable and *visible* real estate by minorities who have lost public favor is bound to trigger the envy of the majority who can invent a number of cunning methods to take it.

Public Church Expansion

When Christianity finally became a world religion during colonial expansion from the sixteenth to eighteenth centuries, Catholic missionaries had inherited this post-Constantine-like freedom to profess Christ publicly, without fear of persecution. This freedom was further bolstered by the fact that it was the missionary’s fellow countrymen who now ruled the land from which they sought converts. Never having experienced the need for an underground church in their generation, they carried on with the usual post-Constantine-like structures for the fledgling new church. The result was large impressive church buildings on huge plots of land, and complex ecclesiastical structures dependent on a foreign hierarchy.

The church structures established under the Protestant thrust of the nineteenth century were not much different. Henry Venn pointed to a kind of religious imperialism that was reluctant to establish truly indigenous churches

that were “self governing, self-supporting, and self-propagating.” Although void of a papacy in ecclesiology, most Protestant missionaries were also under the authority of foreign institutions. Protestants also built impressive churches, schools and hospitals—keeping with the post-Constantine tradition as if the church would forever exist in a peacetime era. Who could foresee a period when colonial reign would cease and local governments grow hostile toward the church?

Those who adopted the colonialist’s Christianity joined the religion of rulers, as did many of Constantine’s citizens. In many cases, the poor stood to gain far more than eternal salvation from aligning themselves with their ruler’s faith. We rejoiced to see many great people movements where masses embraced Christianity. The poor, as in India, were perhaps less inhibited about appearing like unpatriotic traitors to their fellow countrymen, who offered them less to retain their indigenous faith. Christianity was not only an opportunity for peace with God, it was also a chance for the low-caste to move up in socio-economic status; for competing tribes to gain a technological edge on opponents; for the sick to ensure better health from a sophisticated Western school of medicine; for the underprivileged to ensure a better future for their youth with education to keep pace with global transitions. Many no doubt surrendered in full repentance to God’s authority over their lives, but others preferred to enjoy the perks of membership to the ruler’s religious organization without genuine submission to God. Their trial and test had not yet arrived.

Persecution after Decolonization

The colonial era ended, as did the welcome mat for many missionaries throughout Asia and Africa. Colonialists were not just asked to leave; many were kicked out in what Winter calls the “twenty-five unbelievable years.”

By 1945, Europeans had virtual control over 99.5% of the non-Western world. Twenty-five years later, the Western nations had lost control over all but 5% of the non-Western population of the world.¹²

Many nations resented Colonial domination as well as what some considered the unrestrained raping of their land and resources. In most cases, where Christianity remained a minority, people saw the residual presence of the church as a political foothold from their oppressors. But now, instead of colonialists, it was their fellow countrymen who inherited and controlled these structures, proudly calling themselves by the same name as their colonial oppressors—"Christians."

As some of these churches attempted to maintain ties to the Western church—which appeared much like a political hierarchy of foreign benefactors—religious conversion once again was seen as national treason, threatening the very fabric of their society. If those Christian minorities happened to come mostly from the lower strata of society, as was the case in India, unbelievers saw Christianity as the poor man's religion, for dirty and uncivilized people trying to curry favor with the highest bidder. The impressive real estate they inherited from foreign benefactors became objects of envy, vulnerable to the schemes of the majority.

Communism and Islam now became the greatest persecutors of Christian minorities. The masses who converted to Christianity under the religious freedom and protection afforded by colonialism would undergo a testing of their faith. Some would taste intense persecution, while others mild.

The Church in China

After Mao's communist forces gained control of China in 1949, his government expelled all foreign missionaries, eliminated all church organizations,

and subjected Christians to systematic persecution designed to destroy any vestige of Christianity's so called imperialistic control. Although forced to relocate outside of China, missionaries continued their work with great diligence—on their knees in prayer! The missionaries in China were not schooled in underground church planting, nor had they ever experienced such sinister

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hostility toward the church. Many wondered if such persecution would destroy the church in China. Their work would soon be tested by fire. Very little news of the church came out of China until after Mao's death in 1976.

As reports began coming out of China, it became clear that the church not only survived; it thrived! “How?” was the big question on everyone's mind. Carl Lawrence wrote a whole book to answer this question. The short answer is that the church in China followed the apostolic (pre-Constantine) model.¹³ Maybe this was a conscious choice by some Christian leaders, or maybe it was so obvious and natural that they didn't need to develop a theological apologetic for going underground, silently singing hymns like a band of mimes doing a corporate lip-synch to avoid the notice of neighbors. Just as the apostolic church went underground during the intense persecution following Stephen's martyrdom, the church in China did the same. They attended small secret house-based fellowships where they devoted themselves to the study of the Word, prayer, and worship. The seeds planted by missionaries grew and flourished by God's grace.

Discussing several strengths of the church in China from which believers around the world can learn, Lawrence points to its “de-institutionalization” which enabled Christians to fellowship in homes, parks, fields, boats, cemeteries, or on mountains. Lawrence goes on to say, “The church [in China] is no longer a building, but truly the body of believers. ...the clergy-laity distinc-

tion common to institutions has largely been obliterated.”¹⁴

Such a de-institutionalization of the church was clearly essential for its survival amidst such aggressive hostility toward any who publicly identified themselves as Christians.

The harrowing eye-witness accounts of how young Red

Guards of the Cultural Revolution humiliated, tortured, and martyred so many of the saints who refused to deny the Lord Jesus are so horrific that most Western believers can hardly imagine that this tyranny occurred in their lifetime.

While Americans were watching Ozzie and Harriet during the post-war economic peace and prosperity of the 1950's, a Chinese Christian woman was watching in disbelief and horror as Guards cracked her husband's skull open in front of her home.

But not all Chinese Christians persevered to the end. Many were imprisoned and “re-educated” until they renounced their faith. Many genuine believers, under great persecution, not only denied their Lord, as did Peter under less duress (Mt. 26:74), but they also betrayed their brothers in the Lord. Some Western critics—from the safety of their own society protected by their constitution and police—point to the Biblical mandate to confess Christ before all men, suffering for Christ at all costs. But as David Adeney wrote, “...we who have never experienced life in a Communist society are in no position to criticize those who face such difficult tests of faith.”¹⁵

Yet there can be no question that if any lukewarm believers existed before the Cultural Revolution, they were surely purged! The church in China did not grow because going to church was “fashionable” nor even “socially expected.” It grew because believers were ready to give everything they had to follow the One who asked us to carry our cross (Mt. 13:46, Luke 14:27). Many Chinese Christians assume that suffering is a normal Christian experience, citing the words of our Lord,

Then you will be handed over to be persecuted and put to death, and you will be hated by all nations because of me. At that time many will turn away from the faith and will betray and hate each other.... but he who stands firm to the end will be saved (Mt. 24:9, 10, 13)

The relative absence of nominalism undoubtedly had a synergistic effect on church growth, but we also see another factor reflected in the testimony of a Chinese believer, “The more difficult things became, the more we seemed to grow.”¹⁶ Samuel Zwemer, the apostle to Islam, stated it another way: “Opposition is a stimulus to greater activity.” There is something present in the very character of opposition which stimulates growth. Consider Walter Lippmann’s comments from “The Indispensable Opposition,”

A good statesman, like any other sensible human being, always learns more from his opponents than from his fervent supporters. For his supporters will push him to disaster unless his opponents show him where the dangers are. So if he is wise he will often pray to be delivered from his friends, because they will ruin him. But though it hurts, he ought also to pray never to be left without opponents; for they keep him on the path of reason and good sense.¹⁷

When the cherished beliefs of a zealous Christian college student are first challenged by an atheist or agnostic, he scurries to do his homework to try to refute them effectively. Had none opposed him, he may never have learned the apologetics which ultimately made him a

far better evangelist. Opposition, unlike tolerance and apathy, proves that the issue opposed is important and significant—perhaps even threatening. Perhaps this is why William Blake wrote: “Opposition is true friendship.” Communist opposition to the church in China merely fanned the flames of its wild growth. A recent six-month study of church growth conducted in China revealed that the total number of believers may now be over 100 million!¹⁸ The most conservative estimates start at 30 million, but the State Statistical Bureau in China estimated in 1992 that Christians in China number 75 million—all the more amazing when compared to only 5 million in 1949.¹⁹

In spite of public Three Self Patriotic Movement churches (TSPM) reopening under the banner of “religious freedom” in 1979, most house-churches did not choose to come out from underground. The TSPM church is the vehicle of the Chinese government to “free the Christian Church from imperialistic control.” TSPM pastors must, according to the government, help their flock become good “patriotic” citizens of the new socialist order, which will eventually eradicate the superstitious need for religion. TSPM churches are the only “legal” churches of China; independent house churches are illegal and guilty of breaking a law that forbids any religious activity outside the TSPM. Such a law effectively prohibits evangelism where it is most needed. So in spite of the fact that many sincere believers now worship publicly at TSPM churches, house churches (which far outnumber TSPM churches) refuse to disband their secret fellowships only to be ensnared by the restrictive trap of TSPM control which forbids the very expansion of the church through pioneer evangelism.

Persecution of underground churches has intensified since 1989. It now is clear that the official government policy wants to shut down all house

churches. Several thousand believers are known to be in prison, and some are being tortured.²⁰ But the underground church of China continues to experience unprecedented growth, stimulated by opposition and continually purged of lukewarm members.

Christianity’s Greatest Defeat

But persecution doesn’t always succeed in purging the church of the lukewarm, nor does opposition always galvanize the church’s zeal to spread the good news. This is plainly evident in the New Testament where the term “lukewarm” was used to describe the first century church in Laodicea which remained “neither hot nor cold” amidst intense persecution under Emperor Domitian (Rev. 3:16).

Christianity suffered its greatest defeat, according to Kenneth Latourette, in the seventh and eighth centuries when Muslim invaders conquered almost half of Christendom.²¹ The predominantly Christian populations of the Middle East and North Africa were quickly reduced to minorities, and Islam dominated. The phenomenal post-Constantine growth of the church seemed to vanish almost as quickly as it appeared. In spite of many valiant efforts by zealous clergy prior to the arrival of Islam, the lives of the masses who flocked into the post-Constantine church, writes Latourette, were not much better than those of the surviving remnants of paganism.²²

The church had experienced great decline since its public acceptance as an official religion of the Empire in 313. In contrast to the spiritual zeal of the apostolic underground church which not only *survived* the first three centuries of church history but *thrived*—as has the church in China since 1949—the overwhelming majority of Christians in the seventh and eighth centuries did not “stand firm to the end.” The small number of Christians who refused to embrace Islam did not try to go

underground, where their activity could have continued unmonitored. Like a truce after defeat, most agreed to keep their un-Islamic doctrines to themselves in exchange for a peaceful coexistence.

While it only took the apostolic underground church a little more than 250 years of covert *ekklesia* growth to gain a majority in several provinces of Asia Minor and Africa, and while the church in China is already beginning to approach a majority in some cities after less than 50 years of covert church growth, the public church of the Middle East and North Africa seems to have affected little change on its religious demographics after over twelve centuries—no thanks to the bloodthirsty Crusades (1096-1291) giving Christianity an indelible stigma of militant tyranny which Muslims have not forgotten even today.

But lest we pass judgment too quickly on these surviving Christians who cooperated with Muslim rulers by curtailing evangelism, do we not see similar patterns in the West today? The church of America is being attacked, according to Patrick Johnstone, by “an unholy alliance of minority rights groups such as humanists, homosexuals, New Age enthusiasts and pro-choice abortionists [who] exploit the provisions of the constitution and control of the media to disparage and mock Christians and limit or remove anything Christian in public life.”²⁴ Liberal churches in essence have—like Christianity after Islamic conquest—waved their white flags of truce to these aggressive minority groups. They not only agreed to keep their “intolerant values” to themselves in exchange for a peaceful coexistence, but many have actually accommodated the secular relativism which dominates our age and have even given positions of church leadership to members of the above minority groups. The result of this

compliant obeisance to secular hostility not only arrested the growth of liberal churches, but ensured their decline. In fact, it is estimated that 85% of America’s Protestant churches are either stagnating or dying.²⁵ Peter Wagner helps pinpoint this decline:

Beginning with the rise of the social gospel movement toward the end of

History makes it clear that the church of Jesus Christ has always had enemies, ranging from a violently hostile majority to a grudgingly tolerant minority.

the last century, mainline denominations embraced, to one degree or another, liberal theology. Liberal theology inevitably tends to dull the cutting edge of evangelism and church planting.²⁶

Wagner goes on to cite three denominational studies, all done by mainline insiders, contrasting a negative correlation of liberalism with church growth to a positive correlation of conservatism.²⁷ The fact is that while liberal denominations declined in church membership from 1965 to 1975, conservative evangelicals were growing vigorously.²⁸ Why? Perhaps this growth is related to the maxim expressed by Samuel Zwemer, “Opposition is a stimulus to greater activity.” Growth has accompanied the obstinate evangelicals who consistently anger the majority by their unbending and offensive assertion that Jesus is the only way and that the Bible is God’s authoritative Word. But liberals, who significantly outnumber evangelicals,²⁹ left their surrounding culture largely unchallenged, much like the post-Constantine Christians after Islamic conquest. They have adopted the values of their surrounding culture to the degree that unbelievers can hardly distinguish

them as significantly different from any other social institution. Blending in so thoroughly, they have little to offer that the world doesn’t already have, and therefore little to attract new growth.

So was “Christianity” really defeated under Islamic conquest, as Latourette wrote, or did such testing merely reveal the true composition of the church during that era? Religious surveys reveal that 86.5% of America professes to be “Christian,”³⁰ but one has to wonder what that number would be reduced to if military invaders hostile to the church conquered the country. Would all the faithful be martyred willingly, or would some go underground in secret house-fellowships, slowly and quietly evangelizing their invaders and apostate Americans?

One thing is sure: The post-Constantine model of the public church would cease to exist as we know it today. As church buildings were destroyed by order of the new ruler, surviving American Christians would have to meet secretly—especially after witnessing numerous executions of those who publicly professed Christianity. Large churches dependent on one primary leader or teacher would have to disband into smaller groups, constantly changing meeting places in their to avoid the notice of unsympathetic neighbors. New membership to these small house-churches would need to be taken with serious caution, lest a government informer infiltrate the fellowship to destroy it.

Missions to Muslims Today

History makes it clear that the church of Jesus Christ has always had enemies, ranging from a violently hostile majority to a grudgingly tolerant minority. Sometimes the church thrived under hostile conditions until it became a majority; other times it

called a truce and curtailed its growth in exchange for a peaceful coexistence. With the luxury of hindsight, we would be wise to heed the precept: “He who ignores the mistakes of history is destined to repeat them.” So let us attempt to explore ways in which we can not only understand the present situation of persecuted Christians in Muslim dominated lands, but also try to see how the above historical lessons might affect our methodology of church planting among Muslims.

The persecution experienced by Christian minorities in Muslim dominated lands comes in a variety of forms and for a variety of reasons. Christian minorities often live peaceful lives as long as they do not propagate their religious “heresies” among Muslim citizens.

And yet, even when Christian minorities are not guilty of evangelism, violence against them may be motivated by ethnic factors. After a South Indian Christian was brutally assaulted in the north, he asked why they beat Christians. They replied, “We didn’t know you were a Christian; just coming from the south was a good enough reason for us!” Whether we call it casteism, tribalism or racism, many bloody clashes are rooted in ethnicity, not religion. Because the acceptance of the gospel by tribal leaders has often led to the “Christianization” of whole tribes, the lines can get blurred for outsiders hearing reports of violence against “Christians.” Is it “persecution” or “tribal warfare”? Certainly we need to be concerned regardless of the motivation behind the killing of innocent victims, but it is also right to ask whether a “tribal clash” is being christened “persecution” to rally funds from sympathetic Christians.

Economic factors further obscure issues of “persecution.” There is strong evidence to suggest that the genocide of Christians in southern Sudan is more an issue of the desire of northern Sudanese (who are Muslims) to control the rich oil fields in the Christian

south—a predicament introduced by the decision of former president Gaffar Nimeiri to locate oil refineries in southern Sudan.³¹ Should we be surprised that the Islamic Republic of Sudan is using all their military power to prevent the secessionist armies in the Christian south from dividing the Sudan and taking such rich oil reserves with them? The fact that brown Sudanese Arab Muslims in the north have been killing black Sudanese African Christians in the south for years—much like white European settlers killed red native American Indians in the USA—adds yet another layer to the labyrinth of ethno-economic and geopolitical factors affecting the turmoil in Sudan. Lobbying to protect Sudanese Christians without addressing the underlying causes for invasion may fail to achieve any lasting impact.

Many Christians in Muslim lands have inherited valuable real estate from foreign missionaries who accomplished their work during the colonial era. But when the missionaries were asked to leave during the rapid decolonization of the world, protection also disappeared. Muslim majorities see such valuable real estate as free for the taking—especially since a small minority can’t fight back effectively enough to retain it. It should not surprise us to hear a Muslim say, “We don’t kill Christians because they call on the name of our beloved prophet Jesus, but because we want the land which was unjustly bestowed upon them for ‘kissing up’ to the colonialist dogs who raped our country!” Lest we think this phenomenon is the dastardly result of demonic Islamic inspiration, we don’t have to look far to see such carnage over economics in our own Western tradition. The Thirty Years War in the early 17th century is just one such example of anti-imperialist Protestants warring with the Holy Roman Empire until Germany was in ruin, her fields devastated and blood-soaked.

Furthermore, just as many Christian minorities view their suffering as

religious “persecution”—despite the clear ethnic, economic, and geopolitical factors involved—so too do many Iraqi Muslims see their present plight as an issue of religious “persecution” by Western forces. Saddam Hussein has made use of the term *jihad* [holy war] to rally the fervent support of his people against the “Great Satan” (USA). Iraqi Muslims are, in a sense, a religious minority totally outnumbered and outmuscled by a militant international “Christian” confederation—Muslims do not normally distinguish military forces as unrelated to Christianity’s dominance in the West. Yet if Muslims ask President Clinton why he authorized Operation Desert Strike to kill innocent Muslims, he would probably explain, “We didn’t invade Iraq to kill Muslims! The fact that Iraqi forces were heading north into Kurdish territory without UN permission was good enough reason for us! Besides, the US must help keep peace in the Gulf to prevent oil prices from escalating.”

Oil? The same motivation as Muslims forces in northern Sudan? According to *The New Republic*³² the Kurds are in the north, but the oil fields are in the south; and it is the oil fields of Kuwait and Saudi Arabia (the latter deafeningly silent) that the no-fly zone is designed to protect.³³ So was President Clinton’s “strike” rooted in humanitarian concern for the Kurds or more of an economic interest? The fact that he deployed Operation Desert Strike just before an election has also exposed him to further accusations of using the military for his campaign, which, no doubt, is not unique to Western nations. Campaigning politicians garnering support by exploiting public hostility against a minority has long been a tactic to bolster popularity. So can we expect that the situation will be much different when Christians are the minority in Muslim dominated lands?

Many African Christians just south of the Sahara see the great financial

gifts given to local Muslim communities by oil-rich Islamic nations. They then look at their own plight and feel totally deserted by their Christian brothers who enjoy wealth and peace in the West. Faced with the serious need for basic survival and the financial opportunity in the Muslim community, more than a few Christians have embraced Islam. The economic, educational, and medical benefits offered by the missionary community have historically attracted what some have called “rice Christians,” whose need for survival or desire for advance far outweighed religious conviction. We should, therefore, not be surprised to see such “Christians” switch camps to “the highest bidder.”

However, amidst great poverty, others have stood their ground and said, “I would rather starve to death with my whole family than become a Muslim!” Upon closer examination, however, we may discover that some of the Christians who resist Islam do so not because of their unwavering devotion to Jesus, but rather because of their seething hatred for Muslims! Many have been conditioned since childhood to reject even a glass of water offered by a Muslim—lest it be laced with spit. Never mind the possibility of Christians actually inviting Muslims into their homes for a *meal* (Acts 10:28).

When a puzzled missionary visiting Pakistan asked a church official why they wouldn’t engage in any kind of outreach to Muslims, he replied sternly, “If you send any missionaries here to reach Muslims, we will go to the government and get them thrown out!” Why? Christian minority communities are indeed at great risk if missionaries stir up trouble in Muslim communities. Local Christians, who are usually innocent of any attempts to convert Muslims, may take the blame and be attacked by reac-

tionary Muslims long after the “trouble-making missionaries” have been deported. Unlike foreign missionaries, *local Christians have no plane tickets to flee persecution.*

But our question remains: Can the persecution of minority Christians be avoided in any way? If their churches were “underground”—as churches were

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throughout much of the first three centuries of the Christian era—it would be far more difficult for Muslims to wreak havoc on minority Christian communities. How could hostile Muslims (most are not hostile at all) persecute Christians on such a wide-scale if they were not sure *who they were*? Christians could even develop a system of secret symbols as did early disciples like the fish, dove, shepherd and anchor.

Realistically, the fact is that most existing Christians in Muslim dominated lands today don’t have the option of going underground because everyone knows they are “Christians”! Unbelievers thought that the early Christians were Jews, and they were, in the truest sense.³⁴ Early followers of “The Way” continued going to the Temple in Jerusalem³⁵ as well as to the local synagogues.³⁶

Some missiologists feel that mission efforts to Muslims should not encourage the use of the term “Christian” at all, polarizing the followers of Jesus into a separate community who appear to have completely rejected their indigenous

religious heritage.³⁷ This, however, was not the case in the first century when the term “Christian” described the “Messiah-nut” reformist sect of Judaism. “Christianity” was born *within* Judaism, not in direct opposition to it. The polarization of followers of The Way from unbelieving Jews did indeed occur as numerous Gentiles were added to

the faith, but only after about thirty-five years of *ekklesia* growth—not to be confused with modern concepts of “church growth”—providing a golden opportunity for the advance of the gospel *within* the synagogue structure.

It is not within the scope of this paper to defend or oppose such a position as it applies to the Muslim world, but it should be noted that the starting point for evangelism (i.e. from either *inside* the Muslim community or from *outside* of it) can greatly affect the persecution of existing “Christians.” If behind-the-scenes missionaries encourage the development of “Muslims for Jesus” fellowships which do not identify themselves as “Christian” but as a sect of Muslims (much like “Jews for Jesus”), then the existing “Christians” might be safer from the kind of persecution which normally results when Christians try to extract Muslims *out* of Islam and *in* to Christianity.

Just like the Waldensians of the twelfth century, today’s Christian minorities have fewer options than the Jewish reformers of the first century. Christian minorities of today have already become polarized as an entirely separate religious community which isn’t too interested in praying at mosques nor in evangelism from *within* the Muslim community. As a matter of fact, the Christians’ own ethno-cultural and ethno-linguistic heritage make this latter option practically impossible.

Deinstitutionalization

While existing Christian minorities can hardly go completely underground today as the first century “Messiah-nut” Jews did, there are still ways to minimize their losses in the face of such violent hostility. Persecuted Christians can return to the New Testament model of meeting from house to house in cell-group fellowships which are also more easily reproduced by nature of their small size and deinstitutionalized leadership.

Perhaps it would be wise in Muslim dominated lands hostile to the church not to invest at all in church buildings, which are so vulnerable to outbursts of hostility. Church buildings make it too easy for angry mobs to find Christians. Given that the more conservative fundamentalists within the Muslims community often see the mere presence of a church building as a defilement of their land, why anger them unnecessarily?

The deinstitutionalization of the church in China into hidden house-based fellowships clearly facilitated its rapid growth.³⁸ The fact is that such quiet house-fellowships are often the *only* option for many Muslim background believers (MBBs) today. Even if the Christian minorities do trust and accept MBBs into their churches (Acts 9:26), the life of the soon-to-be-extracted MBB may be in danger, not to mention the lives of the minority status Christians who have been granted a peaceful coexistence on the condition that they don’t try to convert Muslims.

When a Muslim enters a public Christian church, the orthodox guardians of Islam often see it as their duty not only to examine the motives of the wayward (or “liberal”) Muslim, but sometimes also to punish the guilty Christian party responsible for deceiving, and perhaps even enticing, the Muslim into such an act of treason. The best option for everybody is usually to refer these Muslim inquirers to an existing underground church. While some countries have

leaders in the public church who cooperate with members of the underground church, other countries have very little cooperation between the two (e.g. China). Those “public Christians” who do have links of cooperation with the underground church usually don’t want to know any names and details of underground church leaders lest they be forced to divulge the information during a torturous interrogation.

But how might minority Christians in Muslim lands respond to the suggestion to deinstitutionalize their fellowship into house-based cell groups in an effort to minimize their losses? Rather than protect real estate, why not protect the Christian fellowships? If they define their “losses” as the monetary value of land and buildings, then deinstitutionalization is a loss to them. It is also possible that the ethno-cultural identity of some Christian minorities is irrevocably linked to the architectural Christian monuments of a bygone era. Given that some, like the Coptics of Egypt, have enjoyed church buildings since the early post-Constantine period, i.e., before the advent of Islam, we can hardly begin to grasp how unthinkable it would be for them to desert the monumental symbols of their presence in favor of home-based fellowships.

For a variety of reasons (all of which appear perfectly valid from a Christian historical perspective) many Christian minorities in Muslim lands seem to believe they have an inalienable right to worship in public church buildings. They believe the unquestioned assumption that there is nothing wrong with identifying themselves publicly as “Christians,” that they deserve all (if not most) of the same economic privileges from Muslim governments that a Muslim citizen enjoys. Yet, the pre-Constantine church never enjoyed such luxuries. Early Christians never had the government-approved right to practice their faith publicly, nor to own land for public church buildings, for Christian

bookstores or schools. While Muslims have been some of the most tolerant rulers throughout history, they changed their stance after the massacre of countless innocent Muslims by militant “Christian” Crusaders (1096-1291). Who can blame them? Why do Christian minorities expect first class treatment from Muslim governments when we in our Christian tradition have such a horrid history of murderous inquisitions? The history of Christianity is filled with reactionary violence in response to perceived heresy. Have we forgotten that Evangelicals were lynching Pentecostals in the early part of this century? We might ask, where did these Christian minorities get the idea that they have the *right* to worship in public church buildings? Not from the New Testament! The persecuted church in Muslim dominated lands is fighting battles the early church never fought—for privileges the early church never had.

While Paul did appeal to Caesar, he did so in a society which actually made provision for such appeals. Paul appealed to a Roman government who wasn’t altogether opposed to his Jewish faith. Paul, from a Roman perspective, was a member of the highly respected Jewish minority. But he clearly did *not* want to be judged by the Jewish legal system in Jerusalem. It was the Jews who were ready to lynch Paul, not the Romans (Acts 25:10-11). A certain amount of genuine altruism towards minorities must be present in a nation’s legal system if such petitions for justice will ever be seriously entertained. It is for this reason that Mahatma Gandhi’s non-violent approach was effective against Britain. Had India been ruled by tyrannical “Christian” Nazis, as Germany was under Hitler, a non-violent approach would have been suicidal. The only way Jews—and countless other undesirable minorities—could escape the death camps was to go into hiding, i.e., “go underground.” Sir Winston Churchill com-

mented, “If Hitler invaded hell I would make at least a favorable reference to the devil in the House of Commons.”³⁹

But while the world has yet to see a Muslim tyrant as wicked as the “Christian” despot Hitler, most Muslim governments do not want to appear anti-Islamic by using force to protect its Christian minorities from the excesses of the public. It seems as if many Christian minorities have actually adopted a post-Constantine type of *ecclesiology*, i.e. they believe that the church must be public and that to do otherwise would be to deny their Lord. Again we must ask: Where did they get this idea if not from the New Testament? Perhaps they just learned from the example of Western Christians whose own ecclesiology is rooted in a post-Constantine paradigm. Most Western missionaries have never experienced “church” in their homelands apart from their post-Constantine-like activities for religious freedom. In our sincere attempt to make disciples of all the nations, we may be overlooking some important realities about the way the apostles arranged the structure of the church to function in hostile environments.

Yet, deinstitutionalization into house-to-house-based fellowships (changing to multiple locations from week to week) will not only enable the church to grow in a decentralized guerrilla-style context, without direct monitoring by Muslim authorities, but it may possibly also produce an environment where Muslim inquirers might actually be able to attend without being seen and criticized by the orthodox guardians of Islam. The Muslim inquirers would, of course, need to persuade Christians that their interest in Jesus is truly genuine. Also, rather than viewing the surrendering of existing church properties as defeat, one might sell them—before they are forcibly taken or destroyed—and

distribute the money to the more needy members of their congregations (Acts 2:45, 4:34), or even help those who need assistance to purchase homes which could then be used to host such house-to-house fellowships groups. In other words, the monies gained from the sale of church properties could be reinvested into New Testament-like church properties—house churches. Although existing Christian minorities can not go completely underground, some, however, may be able to minimize their losses

tion, many Christians practice a kind of “secret” Christianity in the public workplace, showing few overt signs of their faith. They feel uncomfortable praying over meals in public restaurants or displaying religious artifacts in their office or on their car bumpers which would indicate their membership with those “fanatic” Christians. They may even have a modern-day equivalent of a secret fish symbol in their office like a Christian radio station sticker, or even a book discreetly displayed with a not-so-obvious Christian title.

Those further along on the spectrum of contextualization might even encourage these new believers to continue calling themselves “Muslims,” just as the early Christians continued calling themselves “Jews.” Even as the Jewish followers of The Way continued going to the Temple and synagogues, some Muslim followers of The Way might continue to attend prayers at the mosque, while others not. Most likely, orthodox Muslims would eventually call for a separation from these “heretical Muslims” in their midst—even as Jews eventually separated from the “Messiah-nut” Jews. They may even coin a derisive term like “Christian” to distinguish between the two kinds of Muslims.

Missionaries planting underground churches will need to get more savvy in security issues ranging from digitally signed and encrypted e-mail messages⁴¹, to resisting the temptation of writing down any kind of name or address lists of believers. National intelligence is usually very much aware of what most tentmaker missionaries are doing, but as long as they affect little noticeable change on society, they don’t seem to care. However, keeping house as if you assumed police will get everything you have is a good rule of thumb when developing security guidelines.

Among Muslims we need to form quiet house-to-house-based fellowships that can withstand the onslaught of intense persecution.

through some degree of deinstitutionalization.

Planting Underground Churches

For those whose philosophy of ministry includes the establishment of new churches (or *jamaats*⁴⁰) for Muslim background believers—rather than attempting to integrate them into an existing Christian church—the historical lessons of the past have additional implications. Instead of wrestling through the quandary of what to do with “secret believers,” one can decide from the very start that they will establish “underground *jamaats*” which could function much like the early church did after it went underground. They would, of course, need to exercise great caution before admitting new members into these decentralized house-to-house-based fellowships.

For us in the West, it seems we really are not very different from “secret believers.” As hostility towards Christianity increases in the West, with the prevailing cultural relativism and seculariza-

We do wonder what would have happened if early missionaries to Muslims had had a first century paradigm for church planting that wasn't "above ground." What if missionaries had purposed from the start to establish underground churches using the apostolic model as a kind of guerrilla structure to protect the emerging church during times of persecution? Would quiet house-to-house-based fellowships have hindered outsiders from knowing where to strike Christians when angry mobs arose? Might churches have actually thrived under the stimulation of opposition rather than fossilize under the numbing effects of institutionalized structures? Also, in all of our missiological training shouldn't we be teaching missionaries the underground church planting methodology?

Just as appropriate lifestyles change dramatically from periods of peace to war, we should not be surprised if extending God's Kingdom in lands hostile to the church requires totally different methods than those which have proven effective where the growth of the church is accepted and tolerated. Certainly we must pray and do everything within our power to assist persecuted Christians throughout the world. At the same time we may do well when we establish new churches among Muslims to encourage the formation of quiet house-to-house-based fellowships—planting the church underground—that can withstand the onslaught of persecution by its hostile environment.

End Notes

- 1 Richard Wurmbrand, "Testimonies From Persecuted Christians" *Voice of the Martyrs* (INTERNET: <<http://www.iclnet.org/pub/resources/text/vom/testimon.html#2>>).
- 2 Ibid., INTERNET: <<http://www.iclnet.org/pub/resources/text/vom/testimon.html#10>>.
- 3 Acts 7:57-8:3; 11:26; 22:4.
- 4 Acts 1:15; 2:7,14; 9:2; 9:30; 11:26; 24:5,14; Eph. 1:1; 1Pet. 1:1; 4:17; Epi-

- phanus, *Contra-Haeres* l. 1.-Haeres-29.
- 5 Acts 11:26 reads, "The disciples were called Christians...." supporting the view that insiders used the term "disciples" while *christianos* originated from outsiders. The derisiveness of *christianos* is alluded to in its second New Testament usage, also by an outsider (Acts 26:28). Paul, in the presence of fellow Jews, refers to Judaism as "*our* religion" (Acts 26:5). But in contrast to Paul's self-designation as a Jew, Agrippa implies Paul is crazy (as Festus already had) to think that he can be so quickly be persuaded to become a "Messiah-nut,"—*christianos* (Acts 26:24, 28). It appears Paul preferred not to even repeat the term and rephrased his identity, "...[may you become] *what I am*...." (26:29). The third and final Biblical occurrence of the term "Christian" helps us understand why believers would later adopt the term with pride. In light of the early stigma associated with *christianos*, 1Pet. 4:16 could read, "If anyone suffers as [or "by being called"] a "Messiah-nut," don't be *ashamed*, but praise God that you bear that name." In the very next verse, Peter, like Paul, also chose not to repeat the term but described believers as "the household of God", not "Christians" (4:17).
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- 17 Walter Lippmann, "The Indispensable Opposition," in *Atlantic Monthly* (Boston, 1939: repr. in *The Essential Lippman*, 1982), pt. 6, sct. 2.
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- 20 Ibid., p. 166.
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- 25 Leith Anderson, *Dying for Change* (Minneapolis, Minnesota: Bethany House Publishers, 1990), p. 10.
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- 27 Dean M. Kelley, *Why Conservative Churches Are Growing* (New York: Harper & Row Publishers, 1972). Hoge and Roozen, eds. *Understanding Church Growth and Decline 1950-1978* (Philadelphia: The Pilgrim Press, 1979) pp. 191, 241.
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- 33 The Editors, "Operation Desert Prick" in *The New Republic* (INTERNET: <<http://www.eneews.com:80/magazines/tnr/archive/09/editorial093096.html>>), September 30, 1996.
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- 37 Ralph D. Winter, ed. "The Future of the Frontier Mission Movement: How Far Should We Go in De-Westernizing the Gospel?" *Mission Frontiers* (Pasadena: USCWM, September-October 1996), Vol. 18, Number 9-10. Phil Parshall, *New Paths in Muslim Evangelism* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker, 1980).
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- 39 Winston S. Churchill, *The Second World War: The Grand Alliance* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1950) ch. 20.
- 40 An Arabic equivalent to the Greek *ekklesia*, which has been needlessly translated "church" when in fact the same *ekkle-sia* is also translated "assembly" when referring to non-religious gatherings (Acts 19:32,39,41).
- 41 For those who suspect that encrypted e-mail will only draw unnecessary attention to themselves, they can use steganography to hide encrypted data in unnoticeable ways: "Steganography Info and Archive" (INTERNET: <<http://www.iquest.net/~mrmil/stego.html>>). See also "Crypto-Log: Internet Guide to Cryptography" (INTERNET: <<http://www.enter.net/~chronos/cryptolog.html>>).
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Islam and Human Rights

Mission interests in “turning the world upside down” must grasp the significance of Islam, its political-religious system, and its own human rights concerns.

by David Bentley

Robert Qambar Ali, age 44, a Kuwaiti convert to Christ, became the focal point of international concern early this year. His series of trials for apostasy before the Islamic Shi'a court of his home country was well covered by the Arab press while the Kuwaiti government deftly rebuffed global appeals including letters from members of the United States Congress. To the Christians in the West, Robert's death sentence for abandoning Islam is a clear violation of international human and religious rights and raises questions about the reasons for the recently fought war for the defense of Kuwait following the 1990 Iraqi invasion.

In the same week of Robert's sentence of death, similar reports appeared:

Surabaya, Indonesia: Ten churches were torched by mobs of Muslims in broad daylight endangering worshipers gathering for Sunday services¹

Cairo, Egypt: A secular magazine exposes the practice of forcing Christian teenage girls to adopt Islam after “arranged” marriages and incidents of rape.²

Khartoum, Sudan: Two US reporters for a Baltimore newspaper buy a couple of slave boys who can recall their early life in southern Sudan³

Incidents similar to these occur far too often across the Islamic crescent, stretching from North Africa to South Asia, as multiple cases of religious persecution and intolerance go unreported. This article will be limited to some of the root causes of violations of human and religious rights of non-Muslims within this vast swath of humanity. Muslim persecution of Christians as well as other religious groups, including Muslim sects, can be traced to the Quran, but the *Hadith* i.e., the traditional acts and sayings of the Prophet Muhammad, is more inclined to cause relig-

ious discrimination. Modern Islamic Human Rights documents, 1981 and 1990, reveal an attitude attributable to the *Hadith*. This article closes with suggestions for further understanding of ways of making meaningful mission contacts with Muslims.

Muslim Majority Nations

In the 50 nations of the world where Muslims form the majority population, the perceptions of Christian evangelical activities vary significantly. Generally, however, there is a profound distrust of both the missionary and the government departments who are responsible for allowing the missionaries into their country. Often it is the government of an Asian or Middle East country that faces the brunt of the attack when Muslims begin to persecute Christians.

Contemporary missions are not unlike the events that Paul and Silas faced when they evoked the wrath of the religious leaders in Thessalonica (Acts 17:1-9). The Jews accused the first Christian apostles in a civil court of “turning the world upside down.” The Jewish leaders almost succeeded in bringing the Roman authorities into the fray when the synagogue charged Paul and Silas with making Jesus another king in place of Caesar. Jason was among those who were assessed a fine but later was allowed to go free.

An early important lesson for Christians to understand is that the concept of mosque-state separation is foreign to Islamic law, to the *Shari'a*, which is considered superior to any human laws. Missions to Muslims cannot overlook the importance that all Muslims place in establishing a just political order based upon *Shari'a* in order to maintain a state of purity and readiness for

a wide range of human activities from prayer and eating habits to warfare. A guiding principle of the nearly fifty nations that form the Islamic crescent is that the whole world consists of two houses, *dar al-islam* (house of peace where *Shari'a* is settled) and *dar al-harb*, (house of war where Islamic law is not yet instituted).

The Christian worldview includes some thoughts of freedom, justice, and equality that emerged as a part of the message of the first century church. Although the term “human rights” does not appear in the Bible there are the cries of a minority faith aspiring to be tolerated by the major players in the Roman empire. A few centuries later when Christianity became the official religion, it assumed the power of a majority religion. Along with this power, the medieval church frequently ceased to concern itself with many of the aspects of human rights such as justice for the minorities. Today the orthodox churches in Russia are making the same claims that they represent the established faith of the Russian population and are working through the political system to restrain evangelicals and other voices of dissent.

Persecution and Treason

An example of a minority which was successful in overcoming persecution to achieve majority status, only to become the persecutors, is reflected in a single word in the Quran. When the first Muslims were a persecuted minority and denied access to the Meccan holy place the word *fitnah* clearly meant ‘persecution’. Later, when the Muslims became the dominant majority, *fitnah* would be defined as ‘treason’ and ‘sedition’. The phrase can also be translated as ‘subversion’ which is an act that is worse than

‘killing and slaughtering’ according to the Quran.

They ask thee [Muhammad] concerning fighting in the prohibited month. Say: “Fighting therein is a grave (offense); But graver is it in the sight of God to prevent access to the path of Allah to deny Him, to prevent access to the Sacred Mosque, and drive out its members. Subversion (fitnah) is greater than killing. (2:217)⁴

Christianity evolved into “Christianism” over three to four centuries while Islam took only Muhammad’s lifetime, between 609 to 632 AD, to evolve from a persecuted handful in Mecca to the persecuting majority led by a “commander of the faithful” in the last ten years in Medina. The primary advocates of human rights, who naturally include voices for religious rights, are found among the non-orthodox minorities and “liberal” Muslims. They, like Christian evangelists, face an aroused Islam that has been inappropriately named “fundamentalists”. The word itself sprang out of the early twentieth century conflicts within Protestantism when the “Fundamentalists” refused to accept the liberal view of the place of Christian Scriptures. Muslims today believe that the Quran is the uncreated word of God, thus making the overwhelmingly majority of Muslims fundamentalists. The term here refers to a fringe group who would replace any opposition, Islamic or non-Islamic, secular or religious, with their narrow view of applying Islamic law, *Shari’a*, up to and including the use of violence and terrorism.

Taslina Nasrin is a Bangladeshi author who had a death sentence pronounced against her by an Islamic fundamentalist court in 1994. She lives outside of her native Bangladesh and publicly upbraids those who have charged her with blasphemy and sedition. The following is part of the Harvard University address she gave on April 28, 1996, when she referred to “fundamentalist” conflict... “[that] is basically between irrational blind faith and the

modern rational, logical mind....” She added,

The fundamentalists want to replace democracy with theocracy and to impose old theocratic laws instead of modern secular laws on the members of their own society, not on other distant powerful states which they consider their enemies.⁵

Isma’il al-Farouki is another dissonant voice from within the Islamic community who was a victim of a US inner city murder ten years ago. Rather than accuse a disparate group within Islam as a cause of the human rights violations, as did Taslima with the fundamentalists, he saw the impact of Western imperialism on Islam as the culprit.

When politics get so intermingled with Christian mission, what sort of situation would you expect if total religious freedom were allowed? Give us the assurance that political involvement in mission will cease, and that power politics will no longer intrude, then the principles of religious freedom would be approved by every sensible Muslim on earth. We Muslims are at the receiving end of the line injustice. We haven’t emerged yet from two centuries of colonizations.⁶

Secularists, Christian Alliances

Are these secularists such as the Bangladeshi Taslima ready to defend men and women who are caught between the religious and civil authorities on the issues facing minority Christians, women, evangelism, and rights of converts? The evidence of this once happening comes from Turkey where the leftist lawyers guilds helped the Turkish believers who were under attack by the government and the entrenched Muslim leadership. At this time, Christian workers do have a common ally with the usually Western thinking secularists that desire to see Islam open up to a broader idea of human rights. The governments of the Muslim majority areas are a possible ally also, but red flags appear all over the place when Christian missions, secularists, women, and civil governments are seen colluding with each other. However, these groups all face the common enemy

of Islamic militant fundamentalism today.

A wider community exists which is also interested in religious freedom for all. This community exists apart from the secularists and officials of national governments but often they are found in these two entities. They hold an affinity with Christian missionaries about human rights that are universal when it comes to an understanding of human worth as expressed in the Universal Human Rights Declaration. “*All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights.*”⁷ To the secularists these “rights and freedoms” are often described as “inherent” and “inalienable”, but for those within the Hebraic-Christian tradition the declaration of human rights created as we are in the “image of God” is more than an adequate definition. Muslims reject this Genesis precept as it violates their concepts of monotheism wherein God has no partners.

Islamic Human Rights

The Muslim majority nations, however, have come up with their own Declarations of Human Rights which in the end support Islam but insist that there are some principles that the framers felt were “universal” that are beyond laws and codes that men have established.

The 1981 Islamic Declaration of Human Rights Preamble, as is the case with other human rights documents, is a statement of principles without any force of statutory law. It begins by setting forth an Islamic order (Article g) in our obligation to establish an Islamic order:

(1) where all human beings shall be equal and none shall enjoy a privilege or suffer a disadvantage or discrimination by reason of race, color, sex, origin or language.⁸

The omission of any reference to religious equality in this Preamble is partially balanced by Article III (c) which reads:

No person shall be denied the opportunity to work or be discriminated

against in any manner or exposed to greater physical risk by reason of religious belief, color, race, origin, sex, or language.

Three other articles of this Universal Islamic Human Rights Declaration touch upon religion. The applicable sections are quoted below:

X (a) The quranic principle "There is no compulsion in religion"(2:256) shall govern the religious rights of non-Muslim minorities. (b) In a Muslim country, religious minorities shall have the choice to be governed in respect of the civil and personal matters by Islamic Law or by their own laws.

XII Right to Freedom of Belief, Thought and Speech

(a) Every person has the right to express his thoughts and beliefs so long as he remains within the limits prescribed by Law. No one, however, is entitled to disseminate falsehood or to circulate reports which may outrage public decency, or to indulge in slander, innuendo or to cast defamatory aspersions on other persons, (e) No one shall hold in contempt or ridicule the religious beliefs of others or incite public hostility against them; respect for the religious feelings of others is obligatory on all Muslims.

XIII Right of Freedom of Religion: Every person has the right to freedom of conscience and worship in accordance with his religious beliefs.

XIV Right of Free Association: (a) Every person is entitled to participate individually and collectively in the religious, social, cultural and political life of his community.

Despite the fact that this document purports to be a human rights declaration that comes closer to a statement defending Muslim orthodoxy, Muslims recognize the need to respond to the questions posed by human rights theories. It should be noted that most serious restrictions are placed on those who could be charged with denigrating the Law, i.e., *Shari'a*. Any man or woman who chooses to leave Islam can be accused of slander. He or she may not rely on the usual interpretations of freedom of worship, association, and conscience. All of these freedoms are permissible only under the tenets of Islam which are unavailable to minorities and

non-Muslims. The next stage for Muslims is to see the folly of denying to others what they do dearly claim for themselves. This is most apparent in cases where non-Muslims embrace Islam freely but the reverse is opposed in solidly Islamic regions.

Evangelism Attacked as Slandering

The 1981 and a later 1990 Declaration prepared for Islamic Foreign Ministers Conference were eager to protect the favored status of Muslims when they used very transparent language to warn that those adults who volunteer to leave Islam will be held accountable for slander or corrupting societies.⁹ Evangelism in Muslim societies adeptly falls under the rubric of "slandering and corrupting" a nation's cultural, i.e., Islamic heritage. The task of Christian mission to Muslims is to convince the "authorities" that Christians are in favor of a national state where human rights for all its citizens are upheld. This follows the principle found in the United Nations sponsored human rights documents that call for unconditional religious freedom for all adults which the secular Muslim accepts as an inherently human decision and the Christian accepts as part of the *imago deo* precepts found in the creation account.

In most past history, Christianity has seen its adherents freely convert to Islam from the beginning of the Muslim conquests of the seventh century to the present day. Modern Western societies, as reflected in the language of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, UDHR, expect that the converse would also be accepted: that Muslims may leave their faith without threats of persecution and death.

The whole modern issue of Human Rights arose out of the ashes of World War II when the United Nations adopted as a preamble to the membership of the world body the UDHR. Today, Muslim majority nations are in the forefront of tacitly avoiding selective ten-

ets of this unsigned document which they find objectionable. The problems started from the beginning of the U.N., when Saudi Arabia led an assault on the UDHR in 1948. The original attack was generally directed toward the Western terminology of the Preamble and specifically toward the Eighteenth Article:

Article 18 Everyone has the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion; this right includes freedom to change his religion or belief, and freedom, either alone or in community with others and in public or private, to manifest his religion or belief in teaching, or belief in teaching, practice, worship and observance.¹⁰

The UDHR asserts that the source of its authority is located in such criteria as 'inherent dignity' and "inalienable rights", and goes on to thoughtfully register a list of rights that are definitely human and universal.

The Central Message of Jesus

Islam has endured under various political and social conditions for 1,417 years of the Hegira calendar which places Muslims as recent successors of a long "medieval" period. Increasingly in their modern periods, Muslim nations are adopting Western styles of government with elections, parliaments, and constitutions. The fact will remain that Muslims will continue to have a difficult time of accepting the distinctive Christian message of salvation, the unity of God and the non-negotiables of our faith: Jesus Christ's incarnation, crucifixion and resurrection. Converts to Christ will continue to be the pariahs of societies and it may take a couple of generations before they will eventually be accepted as full citizens in states that live under the dream of an uncontested Islamic "house of peace".

The convert, or apostate, under the strictest interpretation of the *Hadith*, (not the Quran) would be forced to renounce any faith but the religion of Islam. The penalty for leaving Islam is death and this penalty is authorized

by the readings of the *Hadith*, "Whoever changes his religion, kill him."¹¹ The Quran is clear that armed rebellion should be punished by death but defers to the life hereafter the exact nature of punishment for anyone who apostasizes from Islam.

Christian responses to any religious-political system that openly persecutes and criminalizes converts and others should remember that discrimination is usually directed against non-orthodox Muslims. Until the convert or any Muslim takes a strong stand to reverse the trends against his or her religious freedom, there is little an outside mediator can do. When believers in Christ are ready to openly challenge the authorities on their free choice, at that time the body of Christ should rally to give unequivocal moral support.

Isolation, intimidation and violations of human and religious rights are always unacceptable! There is a place for serious advocacy in behalf of those who suffer and this can be done from the safety of our democratic homelands. Prisoners, as well as other persecuted individuals, sometimes can be contacted directly with letters, e-mail and personal contacts. Zwemer Institute is among several groups that monitor religious rights practices throughout the Islamic world. Letters to heads of governments and to foreign embassies may be useful in making appeals for those who are openly asking for help or in extreme cases where life is threatened.

Apart from these types of public advocacy, prayers can be offered on behalf of kings, heads of states, parliaments, and other government agencies who are often on the first line of defense against terrorism and radical Islamic political-religious movements. Christians should be ready to commend those individuals and governments who take a courageous stand against those who violate the relig-

ious rights of Muslims and Christians alike.

National Churches and Converts

Suggestions for possible outcomes for those directly involved in missionary activity under adverse conditions are as follows:

1) The cross-cultural missionary's "no entry" in a passport when trouble arises may be the severest abuse that an expatriate receives. But it is the national churches and the individual members, converts and others, without the security of "Roman citizenship" who will face the crowds and the wrath of local and higher government officials.

(2) The new follower of Christ who has peacefully left Islam, (an equal to Jason of Thessalonica) truly represents high risk ventures. The Lord selects specific men and women to be part of the divine, spiritual drama that is still unfolding throughout the Muslim-majority nations. This drama is better understood as a conflict in the heavens that begs Christians not to dwell at length upon present earthly circumstances, but to look to our God to finish the work of calling sinners from all the peoples of the world.

(3) Christians who have been well prepared to work with Muslims know that the message of the Cross could turn the world upside down. Missions should prepare the new churches and believers to pray for the day of persecution that their faith remains true. Radio broadcasts and other materials beamed toward Muslim audiences may openly proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord when men and women will be set free.

In conclusion, historic precedence promising mass response to Christian faith from Islam are meager. It's more likely that more individuals will come to Christ when they are able to see that their rights as believers and human beings are adequately protected by their host nations. The contest that the new

Christians face will be intense as they leave a very secure environment where their nations are supposedly ruled by "God's Law," the *Shari'a*. Western missions to Muslims can point out how much this rule of God is manipulated by man. However, the greater challenge will be to help new converts develop their own confidence in following and serving Christ who is the King over all the nations of the earth!

End Notes

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11. *Hadith from al-Bukhari* (9c) from *Ibn Abbas from Ali*. This statement contradicts all other statements on apostasy by *al-Bukhari*. Rafiq Zakaria *Muhammad and the Quran*, pp. 86-7.

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of their faith as Muslims, are realities that we all should seek after. They also prove the great mission fact that God has not left Himself without witness in the Muslim world. And do we need to know that!

In this issue we will take a good look at another reason for our mission neglect—the Muslim women. Make sure to assimilate the thought provoking article by Fran Love concerning this neglected factor—a strategy that by and large has neglected the “rare and beautiful treasures” of evangelizing Muslim women and planting churches that include them.

Last but not least, we need to explore a possible “justified reason” for the large number of unreached Muslims. Both past and current mission history indicate that *Muslim missions has been very hard*. One mission agency that focuses all its efforts on church planting among Muslims advertises for mission recruits as follows:

WANTED:

MISSIONARIES TO MUSLIMS

Bitter cold, scorching heat, long hours. Sickness almost certain. Possible imprisonment, Safe return not guaranteed. Honor and recognition from peers doubtful. Eternal rewards. Interested parties apply.

What makes Muslim missions so difficult? Although by no means impossible, we will have to conclude that these are no easy mission fields, both for evangelism as well as for church planting. Again there are no easy answers. But one thing will certainly help: We need to learn to evangelize and plant the church of Jesus Christ *in hostile environments where we can expect mild to intense persecution*. We seriously need to read Joshua Massey’s article on planting the church underground in hostile Muslim contexts along with David Bentley’s article on human rights in the Muslim world. Planting the church underground, by means of home-based fellowships, following the New Testament model of house churches, gives us

another great tool to evangelize the neglected unreached peoples and plant the church among them in obedience to our Lord’s commission. May we use “all available means and at the earliest possible time” so that in the Muslim world “every person will have the oppor-

tunity to hear, understand and receive the Good News.”

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